PLATOON

FADE IN:

A QUOTATION AGAINST A BLACK SCREEN:

'REJOICE, O YOUNG MAN, IN THY YOUTH ...'

The sound now of a C-130 air cargo plane roaring over us and we cut sharply to:

EXT.AIRSTRIP - BASE CAMP - VIETNAM - DAY

As the C-130 coasts to a stop, the hatch rotating down on a hot, dusty lifeless airstrip somewhere in Vietnam. Nothing seems to live or move in the midday sun.

TITLES RUN

A DOZEN NEW RECRUITS step off the plane, unloading their duffel bags, looking around like only the new can look around, their hair regulation-clipped, crisp, new green fatigues fitting them like cardboard.

CHRIS TAYLOR is just another one of them - as he turns into a tight closeup, to look at a motorized cart pulling up alongside ... He's about 21. Newmeat. His face, unburned yet by the sun, is tense, bewildered, innocent, eyes searching for the truth.

They fall now on a heap of BODY BAGS in the back of the cart. Two soldiers begin loading them onto the plane. Flies - hundreds of flies - buzz around them, the only cue to their contents.

GARDNER
(next to Chris, Southern accent)
That what I think it is?

SOLDIER 1
(a look)
I guess so ...

An uncomfortable look between them.

SERGENT

Okay, let's go ...

As they move out, Chris' eyes moving with the body bags being loaded onto the plane. Moving over now to a motley HALF DOZEN VETERANS bypassing them on their way to the plane. They look happy. Very happy, chatting it up.

They pass the newboys - and they shake their heads, their eyes full of an almost mocking pity.

VETERANS
Well I'll be dipped in shit - new meat! Sorry bout that boys - 'sin loi' buddy ... you gonna love the Nam, man, for-fucking-ever.

Chris looking at them. They pass, except for the last man who walks slower than the rest, a slight limp. His eyes fall on Chris.

They're frightening eyes, starved, hollow, sunken deep in his face, black and dangerous. The clammy pallor of malaria clings to him as he looks at Chris through decayed black teeth. Then the sun flares out on him and he's past. And Chris looks back. Disturbed. It's as if the man was not real. For a moment there. As if he were a ghost.

Chris walking, duffel bag on the shoulder, looks up at the lollipop sun burning a hole through the sky. A rushing SOUND now. Of frightening intensity, an effect combining the blast of an airplane with the roar of a lion as we hardcut to:

EXT. JUNGLE - SOMEWHERE IN VIETNAM - DAY

The sun matches the intensity of the previous shot as we move down into thick green jungle. We hear the sound of MEN coming, a lot of men. The thwack of a machete. Brush being bulled. We wait. They are getting close.

The CREDITS continue to run.

SUBTITLE reads: December 1967 - Bravo Company, 25th Infantry Division - Somewhere near the Cambodian Border.

A sweating white face comes into view. CHRIS - cutting point. Machete in one hand, whacking out a path for the platoon, M-16 in

the other, he looks like he's on the verge of heat exhaustion. Breathing too hard, pacing himself all wrong, bumping into things, tripping, not quite falling, he looks pathetic here in the naturalness of the jungle. An urban transplant, slightly neurotic and getting more so.

His rucksack is coming apart as well, about 70 badly packed pounds banging noisily.

Behind him BARNES now comes, the Platoon Sergeant. Then the RTO, his radio man, humming lightly. Others are behind, the column snaking back deep into the brush.

We cut around some FACES of the Platoon - all to be seen later. Young faces, hard and dirty after weeks in the field, exhausted yet alert, fatigues filthy, slept-in, torn, personalized, hair way past regulation length, medals, bandanas. A jungle army. Boys.

Chris glancing down at his raw bleeding blisters. Transfers the machete to his other, slightly less blistered, hand. The kid cuts on - struggling but trying, on his last reserves of strength, smashing almost straight forward through brush, not even bothering to look ahead. He smells something, looks around, slows his pace, eyes working ... around to the base of a tree. He moves past it.

And as he does so, the camera from his POV comes around on a dead decomposing 10-day-old GOOK - eyes starting from its sockets, worms and flies feasting.

Chris draws his breath in, terrified. Barnes suddenly appears alongside, his hard humourless eyes looking annoyed from the gook to Chris.

BARNES
What are you waiting for? He ain't gonna bite you. Move out.

Chris looks at him with pent-up hatred and crashes on.

EXT. PLATOON PC - DAY - MOVING

At the COMPANY PC, CAPTAIN HARRIS on the radio.

HARRIS
Bravo Two, Six. What's the delay up there, move it out on point. We've got a link up at Phase Line Whiskey at One Eight Zero Zero, over.

EXT. PLATOON PC - DAY - MOVING -- MORNING

At the PLATOON PC, LIEUTENANT WOLFE sweats heavily as he speaks in his radio. He is also new to the field, a dark little feisty guy, about 24, very hairy, especially in the eyebrows, an intense get-ahead look.

LIEUTENANT WOLFE
Two Bravo, Two move it out. Six says we're jamming 'em up back there. Over.

Barnes, upfront, turns to SAL, his radio man, under his breath.

BARNES
Tell that dipshit to get fucked. Get that other freshmeat up here. Gardner.

As Barnes picks up his pace, irritated now at this reprimand from the CO - coming up on Chris, who is soaked now from head to foot in sweat, dizzy, feeling sick, about to vomit.

BARNES (CONT'D)
What the hell's the matter with you Taylor! You a sorry ass motherfucker. Fall back.

He grabs Chris's machete out of his hand and bulls his way into the foliage, tearing it apart, setting a new pace.

Chris being bypassed by the column, their eyes on him. He is swatting at the red ants that are all over his neck.

GARDNER, another new recruit, fat, hustling up to replace him.

A big and black medic - DOC - comes over, gentle eyes and manner; with him is Sergeant ELIAS, concerned.

DOC
You okay?

CHRIS

Ants. I got ants on my neck ...
(shaking them out)

DOC
(helping him)
Yeah, black ants are killers, you look sick man. You need a little salt.
(reaching into his satchel)

Sergeant Elias, a handsome, graceful dark-haired Indian kid of 23, the squad sergeant, is taking items out of Chris' pack - air mattress, extra unnecessary clothing, extra canteens, grenades, gas mask, books.

ELIAS
(shaking his head, amused)
You're humping way too much, troop, don't need half this shit. I'll haul it for you but next time you check it out with me okay?

Chris nodding, grateful, panting.

The men passing, watching. Chris sorry about this, trying to keep up face.

BUNNY, a young 18 year-old with an angel's face, is pissing in the dead gook's face.

KING passes, glances at him.

KING
You're a sick mother Bunny.

Bunny laughing about it.

Chris standing there one moment, fighting for his breath, suddenly passes out, going over with his 70 pound rucksack, hitting the ground with a loud bang.

ELIAS
(concerned)
Hold it up.

On Chris - his eyes opening. He seems all right.

CHRIS
(trying to get up)
I'm okay ... I'm okay.

Chris crumples backwards. Elias helps him.

EXT. COMPANY PERIMETER #1 - DUSK

The COMPANY - about 100 men who seem insignificant amid the size of the surrounding jungle - is digging into a perimeter of some 100-yard radius. A RESUPPLY CHOPPER lifts off in a flurry of blowing leaves. Bare-chested soldiers chop down trees, clear fields of fire, set out claymores, fill sandbags, chow down. Little fires snake up against the greying red horizon.

EXT. COMPANY PERIMETER 31 - DOC'S POSITION - DUSK

We cut close on a pair of grungy feet - the staple of the infantry - moving up to DOC, the Medic, bandaging them for FU SHENG, a Hawaiin kid.

EXT. COMPANY PERIMETER #1 - RHAH'S POSITION - DUSK

Rhah sets his tripflare. Crawford, with him, putting out a claymore.

EXT. COMPANY PERIMETER #1 - RODRIGUEZ - POSITION - DUSK

Back in the perimeter RODRIGUEZ sets his M-60 in the newly dug foxhole. SAL, next to him, is shaving in his helmet.

EXT. COMPANY PERIMETER #1 - KING'S POSITION - DUSK

KING looks like a king. A lion of a black man but with a sleepy, gentle face, not to be roused, is painfully trying to scrawl a letter home with the pencil held awkwardly, mouthing the words. FRANCIS, a young baby-faced black with long lashes and soft eyes, peeks over his shoulder, shaking his head.

FRANCIS
Shit, King, it ain't d-e-r-e man, it's d-e-a-r, and Sara don't have no two r's in it, fool. Shame on you.

King shrugs, a sleepy stoned voice.

KING
Don't matter, she knows what it means ... an she don't read too good nohow ...

EXT. COMPANY PERIMETER #1 - COMPANY PC - DUSK

Sgt. Elias washes himself, attentive to his body, slender and well-muscled, and extremely handsome youth. Of Indian blood, with long black hair, generous smile, wide facial bone structure, gypsy eyes, and the cleanest white teeth, he could be a young Greek god. He is given somewhat to panache, a silver wristband on his arm, a bandana of black parachute silk hanging from his neck, his fatigues tightened down at the ankle, he pulls his pants down, checking for crotch rot, applying talcum powder to the area, his buttocks facing us.

LERNER, a white kid, 19, from Florida, stopping to admire the frontal view.

LERNER
Mumm, any time sweetheart.

ELIAS
Lerner, you'd choke to death on it.

EXT. COMPANY PERIMETER #1 - COMPANY PC - DUSK

At the COMPANY COMMAND POST a beehive of activity with its four radios, personnel, some Vietnamese scouts milling around. CAPTAIN HARRIS is running down a field map with his THREE LIEUTENANTS. Harris, a broad-shouldered fine-looking military specimen with the requisite Southern accent and football coach mannerism, is directing his remark to 2nd Platoon's LT.WOLFE, who looks a little nervous.

CAPTAIN HARRIS
Sky Six reports a fresh company of NVA moving across from Cambodia to this blue line.
(points to position)
We got a good chance to light 'em up tonight. All platoons will set squad-size ambushes before full dark. Lt. Wolfe
(glances at him)
You 'bush in this area near that ol' Buddhist temple

we passed on the hump in. Lt. Hawkins, you take this area in the rubber plantation...

LIEUTENANT WOLFE
(eager)
No problem sir ...

EXT. PLATOON PERIMETER #1 - CHRIS' FOXHOLE - DUSK

Elsewhere, Chris scrapes out a foxhole, his shirt off, bandana around his head, the work hot and heavy.

TEX is out there setting the claymore as BIG HAROLD and JUNIOR start breaking down their C's.

JUNIOR
(a whining high voice)
Hey Big Harold, gimme your peaches for the fruitcake man.

BIG HAROLD
(laughes loudly)
Fuck you bitch.

JUNIOR
C'mon man, didn't I do you right that time I give you the turkey loaf for the ham and lima beans shit.

BIG HAROLD
Tricky bitch, reason you gimme dat turkey loaf is nobody else can eat that shit 'cept me so don't start your game playing with me Junior.

They're both black, Junior with huge goggle eyes and a face of pimples and pockmarks, his teeth yellowed and decayed, some of them missing. Harold is about twice his size, about 250 pounds, a baby huey concentrating real hard on preparing his stove to eat with.

JUNIOR
Youse a pig man. I hope Manny get dat laundry gig for' you do.

BIG HAROLD
De fool think he's gonna get it but he ain't known

for his thinking.

JUNIOR
He's a fool alright but you a bigger fool. Hey, whiteboy, watcha waiting for - dat hole ain't gonna dig itself ...

Chris looks up, continues working, as Junior chuckles.

JUNIOR (CONT'D)
Hey Taylor, you don't know it but I saved your ass today. I killed a shit-eating dog.
(laughing)

BIG HAROLD
(getting up)
That reminds me, I gotta take a shit.

JUNIOR
You gonna wipe your ass dis time?

BIG HAROLD
Yeah if you let me have your shirt.

CHRIS
(VOICE OVER, as he digs)
Somebody once wrote Hell is the impossibility of Reason. That's what this place feels like. I hate it already and it's only been a week. Some goddamn week, grandma ...
(checking his raw blisters)
... the hardest thing I think I've ever done is to go on point, 3 times this week - I don't even know what I'm doing. A gook could be standing 3 feet in front of me and I wouldn't know it, I'm so tired. We get up at 5 a.m., hump all day, camp around 4 or 5 p.m., dig foxhole, eat, then put out an all-night ambush or a 3-man listening post in the jungle. It's scary cause nobody tells me how to do anything cause I'm new and nobody cares about the new guys, they don't even want to know your name. The unwritten rule is a new guy's life isn't worth as much cause he hasn't put his time in yet - and they say if you're gonna get killed in the Nam it's better to get it in the

first few weeks, the logic being: you don't suffer that much. I can believe that ... If you're lucky you get to stay in the perimeter at night and then you pull a 3-hour guard shift, so maybe you sleep 3-4 hours a night, but you don't really sleep ... I don't think I can keep this up for a year, grandma - I think I've made a big mistake coming here ...

As he speaks, we cut around to various shots of the platoon members on the perimeter - shaving, eating, cooking, playing, etc ...

EXT. PLATOON PC - NIGHT

Towards the end of this voice over, we cut to Sgt. BARNES moving towards the PLATOON PC. A powerful face, a quiet, angry fixed stare, a thick trimmed moustache that helps conceal a network of plastic surgery grafts and scars. The distortion from the jaw up the left side of his face to his forehead, punctuated by a severe indentation above the left eye where a bullet once penetrated his skull.

Walking with him is Sgt. O'NEILL as they join WOLFE, Sgts. ELIAS and WARREN at the PLATOON PC where they're huddled over maps. Warren is a black, thin, tall, paranoid man with untrusting eyes, silent and bitter.

BARNES
(to all, almost pleased about it)
We got boo-coo movement. 3rd Battalion just got hit 15 kliks north of here.
(the MEN react with wary silence)

O'NEILL
(eager to elaborate)
Yeah, they had claymores strung up in the trees, blew a whole fucking platoon to pieces. BAAD SHIT.

Barnes inflects his next words at Wolfe, who is worried.

BARNES
Yeah, they got two Lieutenants and a Captain.

WOLFE
Jesus.

Elias quiet. Barnes studying the map.

WOLFE (CONT'D)
(to Barnes)
Who do you want on ambush, Sergeant?

Barnes doesn't bother acknowledging the question, barely glancing at the Lieutenant, to him a necessary evil. Everybody knows who's really in charge of the Platoon. Barnes flicks his gaze to Elias.

BARNES
Elias - you take your squad and I'll take Tex and Francis from your squad.
(to Warren)
We move out in two-zero mikes.
(concluding)

ELIAS
I thought it was O'Neill's turn tonight.

They all look at each other. O'Neill spits in the dust, a freckled, short red head with a hard worried face, a lifer, 30 going on 60.

O'NEILL
Shit! Morehouse and Sal are short. Fu Sheng's going on R&R, you don't want to send their asses out on an ambush. You got the fresh meat Elias.

ELIAS
(to Barnes)
They don't know shit Barnes, and chances are we gonna run into something.

O'NEILL
So what am I going to do! Get one of my guys zapped so some fuckface fresh from the World can get his beauty fucking sleep!

ELIAS
Hey O'Neill why don't you cool it, you don't have to be a prick everyday of your life, you know.

O'NEILL
Fuck you Elias.

BARNES
You get your men ready Elias ...

Concluding the debate, no further argument, Barnes rises. The meeting's closed. Lt. Wolfe hasn't said a word, looking as Elias departs, without a word.

O'NEILL
(watching him)
Fucking guy's got 3 years in and he thinks he's Cochise or something ...

His resentment directed partly at the way in which Elias carries himself, the natural sense of grace - and the dignity it bestows.

CUT TO:

EXT. PLATOON PERIMETER #1 - SQUAD ASSEMBLY POINT - DUSK

Later. On the very edge of the perimeter, darkness coming down fast, the men in the ambush patrol rustle into their packs, all of them bitching.

Tex, carrying the M-60, looks up at the glowering sky.

TEX
Shit, looks like rain. All night too. Gonna grow mushrooms in your bad-ass crotch Junior.

JUNIOR
(under his breath)
Goddamn ain't no justice round here, you break your ass for de white man ... gonna get our act together, do some rappin' wid de brothers, change things ...

CRAWFORD
What's O'Neill have a nose up the lieutenant's ass already, how come we always get ambush.

FRANCIS
Politics, man, politics. We always getting fucked around here.

Chris is scared, nervous with his last-minute equipment adjustments, his pack obviously overweight for a night mission as he hauls it up.

Gardner, the other new boy, is jovial in contrast, his wallet extended towards Chris.

GARDNER
Hey Chris, I show you a picture of Lucy Jean?

CHRIS
(not to be bothered)
No ...

Gardner shows him his girl. She's real dog u-g-l-y, and what makes it worse is Gardner's put the standard photo of Raquel Welch alongside it, tits and all. But he misses the irony of it.

GARDNER
(admiring)
Yeah she's the one all right ... that's Lucy Jean. She's a-waiting for me.

CHRIS
(nodding)
Yeah she's real pretty, you're lucky ...

Gardner puts it away. Elias appears alongside them, checking their packs out, takes out Chris's poncho liner and other items. He carries a modified M-16 with a short barrel and a collapsible stock.

ELIAS
(to both boys)
Don't need this or this ... you're doing okay. Just stick close to Tex, do what he does.
(calling out to Tex)
Tex you got Junior and Taylor here on your position.

Tex is a sour Texas Ranger type, chews tobacco, spits.

TEX
Damn, 'Lias this gun's boss. Put Taylor someplace else.

Chris feels the words like lashes on him.

ELIAS
You got Taylor ...
(to Gardner)
... Gardner you go with me
(to Chris and Gardner)
'Case somethin' happens to you, you get separated or lost don't yell out okay. Sit tight. We'll get to you.

His eyes. Chris watching them. A smile in them. Elias moves off, a quality to the man that Chris admires. A natural sense of leadership.

BARNES
Okay, let's move out.

As he follows King, on point, out the perimeter. A single file.

EXT. THE AMBUSH NIGHT (RAIN)

Night is coming down. The tone of the jungle sounds has subtly shifted - mellower, more sinuous and certainly scarier.

The file stops. King, an experienced point man, listens.

Chris - carrying Tex's linked ammo - looks around, tense. Behind him is Gardner, trying to smile, starts to whisper something ('Hey Taylor ...') when he's abruptly shushed.

The file moves on. Gardner's pack rattling a little too loud. A weird rush of cold wind now rattles the trees and the MONSOON comes. A hard slanting rain, sudden, tropic.

EXT. RUINS - JUNGLE - NIGHT (RAIN)

A piece of an old Buddhist temple, under a sulky moonlight now in a state of decay, the jungle surging to engulf it.

The Men are setting up quickly and relatively quietly in the ruins - alongside a miniscule trail. The rain is coming down harder than ever.

Chris and Tex setting out their claymore mines, raveling back

their detonating cords to their position, drenched. In the far distance, an ILLUMINATION ROUND brightens the sky for a brief moment. Various ad lib curses and directions are lost in the sound of the rain.

EXT. AMBUSH - BARNES' POSITION - NIGHT (RAIN)

At the Ambush CP, Ace whipsers into his radio. A soft hissing sound.

EXT. AMBUSH - CHRIS'S POSITION - NIGHT (RAIN)

Later. Close on Chris being shaken awake.

TEX
Taylor, you're on.

CHRIS
(groggy)
Uh hunh.

The rain continuing to pelt them. Tex hands him an infrared scope.

TEX
(suspicious)
You sure you know how to work the claymore?

CHRIS
(offended)
Sure.

Tex curls up as best he can in his poncho to sleep.

TEX
Okay ... don't catch no zzz's on me buddy or I'll sling your motherfucking ass ... You hear me?

CHRIS
(grits his teeth)
Yeah.
(looking at his watch)
Hey Tex - you're ten minutes fast.

TEX

Sin Loi.
('tough luck', closes his teeth)

Chris lets it go, scans the jungle and trail with the scope. The POV is greasy and blurred. He puts it aside.

Suddenly a series of resonant SNORES crack through the jungle. Chris starts, then sees it's from JUNIOR lying out there, spreadeagled in the rain. Chris prods him.

CHRIS
Junior!

JUNIOR
Unh? ... Unh.

CHRIS
Shaddup! You're snoring ... Shhh.

Bending low into his eardrum. Junior never wakes, rolls over with a growl. Silence.

CUT TO:

EXT. CHRIS' POSITION - NIGHT (RAIN)

Later. A pool of muddy water has formed, in which a pair of buttocks sit. Move up to Chris still on duty, looking at his watch, drawn, drenched, pathetic, rainwater coursing down his face.

CHRIS (V.O.)
(continuing his letter)
... 'Course Mom and Dad didn't want me to come, they wanted me to be just like them - respectable, hard-working, making $200 a week, a little house, a family. They drove me crazy with their goddamn world, grandma, you know Mom, I don't want to be a white boy on Wall Street, I don't want my whole life to be predetermined by them.

A large RIPPING SOUND as the wind blows down a big tree branch onto the jungle floor. He starts, peering out. Nothing. He looks at his watch again.

CHRIS (V.O.) (CONT'D)
... I guess I have always been sheltered and special, I just want to be anonymous. Like everybody else. Do my share for my country. Live up to what Grandpa did in the First War and Dad the Second. I know this is going to be the war of my generation. Well here I am - anonymous all right, with guys nobody really cares about - they come from the end of the line, most of 'em, small towns you never heard of - Pulaski, Tennessee, Brandon, Mississippi, Pork Bend, Utah, Wampum, Pennsylvania. Two years' high school's about it, maybe if they're lucky a job waiting for 'em back in a factory, but most of 'em got nothing, they're poor, they're the unwanted of our society, yet they're fighting for our society and our freedom and what we call America, they're the bottom of the barrel - and they know it, maybe that's why they call themselves 'grunts' cause a 'grunt' can take it, can take anything. They're the backbone of this country, grandma, the best I've ever seen, the heart and soul - I've found it finally, way down here in the mud - maybe from down here I can start up again and be something I can be proud of, without having to fake it, maybe ... I can see something I don't yet see, learn something I don't yet know ... I miss you, I miss you very much, tell Mom I miss her too - Chris.

He moves towards Junior, shakes him, but Junior seems to be out of this world.

CHRIS (CONT'D)
Wake up!

Junior opens one dead eye.

CHRIS (CONT'D)
It's your shift, man ...

Junior scowls, swears, looks around for his rifle in the mud.

Chris crawls back to his position, curling himself up in his soaked poncho, teeth chattering from the cold, rain splattering over him. A long beat. He sighs, the sigh kicking off the next image.

EXT. CHRIS' POSITION - NIGHT

Chris jerks awake - very suddenly, very frightened. THE RAIN HAS STOPPED. The jungle sounds are loud. Cicadas, night animals, water dripping hypnotically from leaf to leaf. And the whirr of a million mosquitoes out after the rains, chewing at Chris' face. He looks around, startled.

Tex is asleep. Junior is asleep. What happened? He looks at his watch. The mosquitoes are eating him alive. He buries his head in his green towel which he wears around his neck, but he can't see. A beat. He moves again, miserable from the bites. Another beat. Then suddenly the sounds of the jungle shift - some of the animals dropping out. A different tone. A piece of wood is stepped on, a rustle of bush ...

Chris sees something, lifts an edge of the towel to peek out.

A shoadow of a figure is frozen there in front of him about 15 yards. It looks like a man. But it doesn't move. At all. It listens.

Chris, his heart in his mouth, tries to peer through it. It's a bush. It has to be. No human being could stand that still. His heartbeats are up. The moments take forever. But deep down - somewhere in his psyche - he knows who it is.

The figure now shifts, ever so slightly - and moves. It IS a human being. Oh my God!

Chris looks around. Tex seems like a mile away. Why doesn't anyone fire! He casts a desperate look at his rifle, at his grenades encrusted with mud, but in spite of all his training, he is frozen with indecision and fear at the sight of his enemy.

The figure seems to whisper something back, then turns and comes down the trail. Now a second and third figure appear behind him - all in helmets and packs. All coming right past Chris' position. Ten yards. Nine.

Chris is rigid with terror. Stark eyes. Pleading with Tex to wake up, but out of reach. He is about to have an anxiety attack, his heartbeats so far up he is sure they will hear him.

The first figure is now directly in front of Chris on the trail, looking left and right. A rattle of his equipment, a creak of leather. A smell. The man's face now catches the moonlight and his eyes come around on Chris.

Oriental eyes. Looking right at him. Startled. Chris staring back, hypnotized. It all happens very fast. The figure murmurs something in Vietnamese. A warning. He swivels.

A flash of muzzle fire. A raking cough of automatic fire. A grenade explosion.

Chris is hurled to the ground, helmet bouncing off, scattered, confused, jarred. All hell breaks loose around him with NOISE and SHOUTS.

Tex, kissing the ground, is yelling at him.

TEX
THE CLAYMORE! GET THOSE FUCKERS!

Chris, not knowing what he's doing, is fumbling with the claymore handles, presses them. INSERT: They won't give. He tries again and again to the squeeze the life out of them. Tex is screaming at him.

TEX (CONT'D)
THE SAFETY! TAKE THE SAFETY OFF YOU ...

Lunges over and grabs the handle from Chris. Clicks the safeties off and blows them.

Three EXPLOSIONS rip out into the night - and one of the ENEMY is caught in a brief instant looking like an X-ray, his body lifted and swirling in the air, then enveloped in swirls of smoke.

Chris, trying to keep up, grabs his M-16, lays out a stream of fire. The sound all around him is deafening.

EXT. GARDNER'S POSITION - NIGHT

Gardner, freaking out, stands crouched, confused, tries to run, collapses.

EXT. O'NEILL'S POSITION - NIGHT

O'Neill throws a grenade, wild.

EXT. CHRIS' POSITION - NIGHT

An explosion. Chris hits the deck.

Tex is now on the M-60 machine gun, yelling at Junior who is cringing on the ground.

TEX
Feed me!

He lays out red tracer bullets like laser beams, then suddenly reels back, whiplashed, screaming. A grenade explosion rocks them.

TEX (CONT'D)
AAAAAGHHH! MY ARM! MY ARM!

His hand and wrist are gone, his face in the dirt. Junior is fumbling around, trying to stay down and help him at the same time.

JUNIOR
(grabbing Tex's gun)
DOC! GET UP HERE! TEX IS HIT!

Chris, looking out to his front, has no clue what's going on. Except the fire is slacking. Relayed shouts of 'Medic! Medic!' Other SHOUTS.

SHOUTS
HOLD IT UP! HOLD IT UP!

The firing has ceased. A silence, punctuated by occasional shouts and fast moments, has enveloped once more the cemetery. Doc crashes through the bush, kneels over Tex, who continues to howl in deep pain.

TEX
(freaked out)
MY ARM! JESUS FUCKING CHRIST!

DOC
Easy Tex easy boy!

Trying to sound calm but his voice is on the edge, examinging the mutilation with a pen flashlight, he whips out his morphine in a big hypodermic.

VOICE
(next position)
Doc over here! Gardner's hit.

DOC
'Right there.

As he slips the morphine into Tex's arm.

TEX
(muttering at Chris)
... godamn! Godamn! DUMB FUCKER, DUMB FUCKER!

Chris watching, suddenly feels himself dizzy, instinctively runs his hands over the back of his neck. Feels the warm blood there. A moan comes from his lips. Junior looks at him.

JUNIOR
Oh shit, Doc he's hit too.

CHRIS
(weakly)
I'm hit ...

Barnes and Big Harold come hustling up.

Doc finishes tourniquetting Tex, cradles Chris onto the earth, his flashlight probing the wound. Tex in background continues to thrash and moan.

Chris waits, tensely for the verdict, his eyes big with fear on Doc, who takes out his morphine.

JUNIOR
(to Barnes, pointing at Chris)
That dumb fuck didn't blow his claymore!

Chris hearing this. Barnes looks at him.

DOC

(to Chris)
... it's a scratch, nothing to worry about.

CHRIS
(suspicious)
Doc ... tell me the truth, don't lie to me.

The needle goes in. Tex lets out this strange keening moan that sets everyone's teeth on edge.

JUNIOR
(to Barnes)
He let'em walk right up on us. He was sleeping on his shift.

CHRIS
(muttering weakly)
I was not ... it was your ...

DOC
(leaving, to Harold and Junior)
Self-preservation's the first law of nature. Gotta learn how to work your shit Taylor. Watch me, don't let'em go into shock.

Tex's moans are maddening and scary. Barnes suddenly clamps his hand over Tex's mouth shutting him up and from way down deep in his throat, chokes out the words.

BARNES
Shut up! Shut up - and TAKE IT! TAKE THE PAIN!

Tex's eyes roll wildly, uncomprehending. Doc and Big Harold looking at Barnes, wondering. Tex is suddenly silent, shocked. Barnes stands, an icy glare, goes. Junior scrambles over to Tex's side. Doc runs off.

Big Harold cradles Chris, his big black hands like a mother, reassuring him.

BIG HAROLD
You gonna be okay Taylor, okay, don't you start worrying now.

Chris looking up at him, eyes blinking slowly, dazed already by

the morphine. He's very scared.

CHRIS
Do you ... do you know you're gonna die ... Big Harold? ... do you feel like ... like ... everything's gonna be fine and then ...

BIG HAROLD
Bullshit man, you gettin outta the field, man. Three hots a day, white sheets, dem pretty white nurses give you blowjobs too you pay em enough, I heard tell bout dem white bitches. Better save yo strength Taylor.

JUNIOR
(muttering darkly)
Don babytalk him man. Cocksucker fell asleep. They walked right up on us, he don do shit.

BIG HAROLD
Shaddup bitch.

Chris is gettin woozier, feeling he is dying but starting to grin, not caring about it anymore. Yet he is nowhere close to dying.

CHRIS
It's not ... so bad ... dying. How long .. it ...

EXT. TRAIL - RUINS - POSITION #1 - NIGHT

Barnes stands over a moaning, ripped up ENEMY SOLDIER. FIRES his M-16 point blank into the head. The Soldier bucks and dies, quivering.

EXT. TRAIL - RUINS - POSITION #2 - NIGHT

ELIAS, checking out a blood trail some distance away, shifts on the shot, looks back.

EXT. TRAIL - RUINS - POSITION #3 - NIGHT

FRANCES, MANNY, BUNNY and KING are huddled over another mangled enemy corpse.

BUNNY
(stripping the corpse)
That's no NVA man. That's a chink - look at 'em, the cocksucker's six and a half feet tall. Look at his gear - good as ours.

FRANCIS
Shit I blew my claymore right in one dude's face and I seen him walking around afterwards.

MANNY
What we fighting here, vampires?

EXT. TRAIL - RUINS - POSITION #1 - NIGHT

Elias comes up to Barnes swiftly, indicating the blood trail leading off into the bush.

ELIAS
Blood trail just keeps going and going but no body.

BARNES
How the hell did he get away?

ELIAS
Fuckers returned fire soon as we lit 'em up. Hard core fuckin' NVA. They got their shit together.

RING
(coming up to Barnes)
Sarge - Doc wants you. There's a problem with the new man.

Elias and Barnes go with King. Past Chris and Tex who are ambulatory and bandaged, being helped along. As Barnes passes, the men look at him, everybody quickly senses something is wrong.

EXT. GARDNER'S POSITION - NIGHT

At one of the positions Doc is working feverishly to knock the life back into Gardner who lies there, his shirt stripped off on his cottage cheese belly. A huge sucking chest wound. He's dying. You know it because he knows it. The eyes do the talking, numb, terrorized yet strangely detached, accepting, not protesting or concerned any longer.

Most of the ambush has assembled and is watching, Chris moving in to see. Doc is mumbling to him, low key.

DOC
Chopper's on the way Gardner, hang in there, you gonna be okay ...

But Gardner seems unconcerned. Things are going on in his head - who knows what. And in his eyes there are big tears rolling. Then a morphine smile. A sort of goofy Gardner smile, maybe thinking about Lucy Jean, who knows. He's dead.

BARNES
(to all)
Take a good look at this lump o'shit ...
(motions to Gardner's body)
Rmember what it looks like, all of you. You fuck up in a firefight and I guaran-goddamn-tee you, a trip out of the bush - IN A BODYBAG. Out here, assholes, you keep your shit wired tight at ALL times ...
(glares directly at Chris)
and that goes for you, shit for brains. You don't SLEEP ON NO FUCKIN' AMBUSH. Next sonofabitch I catch coppin' z's in the bush I'm personally gonna take an interest in seeing him suffer - I SHIT YOU NOT ...

He thumps Chris lightly but menacingly in his chestbone and moves on.

CHRIS
(drowsy)
I didn't fall asleep, Sergeant, Junior ...

BUNNY
(pissed, cuts in, shoves him hard)
Shut your face chicken shit! You in big trouble boy!

O'NEILL
Excuses are like assholes, Taylor - everybody got one.

ELIAS
Knock it off! We got two men need attention here. Police up your extra ammo and frags, don't leave

nothing for the dinks. Hoyt, Junior, carry Gardner.

JUNIOR
(muttering)
Let de white boy carry his ass, he this dude that got him fucked up. Who'd be hauling his ass if that was a brother laying there?

Elias follows Barnes out of earshot of the others.

ELIAS
Man'd be alive if he'd had a few more days to learn something.

Barnes, registering it, just keeps on walking.

EXT. BASE CAMP - DAY (WEEK LATER)

Chris is driven up in a jeep to his Company PC - marked 'Bravo PC' on a C-ration box. It's midday on a hot lazy afternoon, few people out in the 102 degree sun.

Chris' Company is on the outskirts of the base camp, their barracks regulation wood, canvas, and fine mesh screening, red dust everywhere, bunkers down on the perimeter, reams of barbed wire and concertina, a sand-bagged MESS HALL and CHAPEL, 81 mm mortar pits, observation towers, recoiless rifles, 50-caliber machine guns.

Chris gets out of the jeep, stiff-necked, a bandage around it, still in some pain. The first man he intersects is KING, carrying crates of beer.

KING
Hey Taylor, what's in the breeze?

In King's mild tone Chris tries to read his standing in the platoon.

CHRIS
Okay - got light duty, three days.

KING
Shit, too bad we in base camp anyway.

CHRIS
What you got there - beers?

KING
Yeah, just stole me some from the Top's supply but he's stealing it from us anyway.
(sees somebody coming)
Chucks are coming. You better 'didi' man.

Too late. Sgt. O'NEILL, the redhead lifer accompanied by Spec 4 SANDERSON, a big handsome blond kid, not too bright in the face, both slightly drunk, come around a corner, beer cans in hand. O'Neill sees Chris immediately.

O'NEILL
Hey Taylor - you back?

CHRIS
(pause)
Uh, looks like it?

SANDERSON
(spotting King's beer)
Where'd you get that beer King?

KING
(a funny look)
I found it ...

SANDERSON
You found it? ... Bullshit! You going on report. Gimmee that shit.

O'NEILL
Awright, come here both of you. You too Taylor
(wags his finger)
Got a little special job for you.

They advance toward him reluctantly.

CHRIS
I got light duty, Sarge. Doctor said to take it easy couple days.

O'NEILL

(laughes)
... ain't that tough shit now.

EXT. THE OUTHOUSE - DAY

A wooden cabin with some half-dozen seats built over half barrels cut from empty oil drums. A guy is in there, pulling up his pants.

Chris, King and Crawford, a California blond with a handsome honeyed look, are sweeating heavily as they roll the barrels out from under the outhouse, the smell of human waste strong. A hot midday emptiness, nobody around except the flies.

KING
(pissed)
... Motherfuckah, motherfuckah, I'm too short to be dealing with this shit! They keep fucking with us man, no letup ...

CRAWFORD
(equally pissed)
Politics man, fuckin' politics. That O'Neill man got his nose so far up Top's ass he gotta be Pinocchio...

KING
Forty-two days man and a wakeup and I'm a gone motherfucker. Back to de WORLD.
(dreaming in his eyes)

CRAWFORD
Broke a 100. Got 92 to go. April 17. DEROS man. California this summer. Waves are good they tell me, surfin's gonna be good ...

KING
March man in Tennessee, sniff the pines ... sniff that crossmounted pussy walkin' down by the river. What you got Taylor?
(a snicker)
Let's see three hundred and WHAT?

CHRIS
... 32. 332 days.

CRAWFORD
(groans)
Oh man! Sorry bout that. I can't even remember when I was 332. You gotta count backwards like you got 40 days in - think positive.

KING
(to Chris)
How the fuck you get over here man, you look like you educated ...

CHRIS
I volunteered.

KING
You WHAT? Say 'gain.

CHRIS
Yeah, I dropped out of college and told 'em I wanted infantry, combat, and Nam ...

He grins, finding their reactions funny. It's also the first time we've seen Chris crack a smile.

CRAWFORD
You volunteered for this shit man?

KING
You a crazy fucker, givin' up college man.

King has long sleepy eyelids and cat's eyes, a large pink tongue and big white-edged cotton picker's nails - a lazy, gentle nature, content with the world.

CHRIS
Didn't make much sense. Wasn't learning anything ...
(hesitates)
And why should just the poor kids go to the war - and the college kids get away with it.

King and Crawford share a smile.

KING
What we got here a crusader?

CRAWFORD
Sounds like it.

They pause, wipe the sweat off. King lighting up a half-smoked joint, hitting a few puffs, eyes shooting around, making sure he's not spotted, passing it to Crawford.

KING
Sheeit, gotta be rich in the first place to think like dat. Everybody know the poor always being fucked by the rich. Always have, always will.

Noticing Chris is having trouble with his neck, picking at his bandage.

KING (CONT'D)
You okay man? Neck botherin' you?

CHRIS
Nah ...

KING
Here have some of this. Won't feel a thing.

Chris looking at the joint, a little apprehensive. He's never smoked.

CHRIS
No, thanks ...

KING
Go on, whatcha gotta lose, yo' here now ...

CRAWFORD
Kills the smell of shit anyway.

The joint proferred. Chris waits a beat, shrugs, takes it, smokes.

KING
Suck it in. Hold it ... That's it. Now let it out.

Chris blows it out.

CHRIS
Don't feel it.

King and Crawford chuckle, go on rolling the cans.

KING
Dat's what they all say.

CUT TO:

EXT. OUTHOUSE - LATER - DAY

King, Crawford and Chris pour kerosene over the cans at a secure distance from the outhouse.

King lights it. The cans pop and start crackling. A line of burning barrels. Rings of dirty black smoke rise against a soft blue sky.

They watch, stoned. Chris turns to both of them.

CHRIS
... you know that night we got hit ... I ...
(ashamed)

KING
Fuck it, don't mean nothing, no such thing here as a coward, done your best man, next time y'do better.

CRAWFORD
History, man, history.

Chris surprised at their attitude. The joint suddenly hits him, a look in his face, eyes looking around different. Over at King.

CHRIS
(deadpans)
I think I'm starting to feel that stuff ...

Crawford laughes.

KING
(laughes)
Yo getting there Taylor. You be cool now and I'll introduce you 'round to some of the 'heads'.

CHRIS
What are the heads?

KING
(laughes, walks away with Crawford)
Later ...

Chris alone, breathes deep, feeling the full effect.

EXT. BASE CAMP - NIGHT

A relief against the long harsh, hot day. We see lights on all over the camp, sounds of music, laughter from the barracks.

INT. UNDERWORLD HUTCH - NIGHT

King leads Chris down to a specially constructed cellar-like hutch dug deep into the ground on an isolated edge of the battalion perimeter. Ammo casing and canvas are piled over it, and sandbags surround it. From the outside very little sound can be heard as they go down through a trap door made of ammo crates. Past a lookout (Adams) pulling security, hitting a joint but alert. King motions to him, it's cool.

Inside is another world. Chris looking around amazed. It's like a private cabaret for the 'heads' who are there cooling out. Boxes of food from the States, beers, whiskey bottles, crates functioning as tables, hammocks hanging from poles, electric fans, tape decks, paraphenalia.

The boys are all dressed up in their Saturday night rags. The clothes are clean, the headbands, the medallions are out, anything distinctive and individualistic. On the tapedeck, Jefferson Airplane's 'Go Ask Alice'.

To Chris it is a new world. And RHAH, the resident head, sitting there in all his finery puffing a huge burning red bowl in a three foot long Montagnard pipe, seems to be the lord of final judgement in this smoky underworld.

Across his naked chest, birds and snakes are tatooed. Around his neck a black skull and white ivory cross side by side. On his knuckles 'Love' and 'Hate' are tattooed. In his eyes, a dancing Satanic fire. A poor rural Southern white, in his grizzled late 20's, he could be a Biker King. Giving Chris the once-over.

RHAH

Whatcha doing in the underworld Taylor?

KING
(smiling)
This ain't Taylor. Taylor been shot. This man Chris been resurrected ...

Chris wondering what he's doing here. His eyes roving over LERNER, CRAWFORD, MANNY, FLASH, FRANCIS, HOYT, TUBBS, DOC, other from the Platoon, about 9 or 10 of them.

Rhah eyes him back, hands him the bowl.

RHAH
You lame Taylor?

CHRIS
What?

RHAH
You lame or something?

KING
(smiling)
... go ahead on, smoke it man.

Chris understands, takes the bowl. Hesitates. Then smokes it. The contact fumes are almost enough to knock him out. He starts coughing. They're all laughing.

RHAH
Your shit's in the wind troop. Baaaaah!

Lerner replies, his tongue hanging out in parody.

LERNER
And Baaaaaaa! back on you.

RHAH
(looking at Lerner with distaste)
If you're gonna do it man, 'least do it right.

Building up to it, his eyes shaking with conviction at the whole insanity of the world, he neighs with all the venom he can muster.

RHAH (CONT'D)
Baaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!!!

They all laugh and applaud. King smoking from the pipe passing it back to Chris who takes another hit, doesn't cough this time, looking around, wondering about these guys.

LERNER
I didn't like it.

RHAH
Bah, you're a child, Lerner. Rhah don't waste time on you.

They go on ad-libbing with each other, teasing Doc, who's fairly straight, saying he wants to go to med school in the fall. 'Be what?''A gynecologist, man.''What dat?' Francis suggests, 'Dats a pussy doctor, man - he's gonna be Doctor Feelgood, man!' They're all cracking up, finding every joke funny. As Chris finishes his hit on the pipe, looks up across the smoke, already dazed, surprised to see ELIAS suddenly there - leaning out of his sling in a far corner of the hooch. A Monkey is draped around his neck with silver bracelets, rings, a necklace - like a sensual little Egyptian whore, Elias playing with it, spaced out in a sleeveless vest, tiger pants. Dancing eyes on Chris, he swings out the hammock, comes over with the monkey.

Meanwhile Manny has broken into a high falsetto snatch of blues directed at Chris, joined by Big Harold and Francis, all of them clicking their hands.

MANNY & BIG HAROLD & DOC
Oooh Chris, you look like you is high oh yeah, he looks like he is high Ooooh Chris, you know you gonna be that way all night oh yeah I think that you are ... Yeah! up now and up to par oh yeah.

Elias pulls out a Remington 870 shotgun, jacks it to the rear, points it at Chris.

ELIAS
Put your mouth on that.

Chris does so slowly, a little worried. Elias takes a hit and

blows it down the bore - 'shotgunning' it into Chris' lungs. Chris staggers back, coughing. Everybody laughes 'hey dude - you done had your ass blown away' etc ...

Elias smiles his big white-tooth smile.

ELIAS (CONT'D)
First time?

CHRIS
Yeah.

ELIAS
Then the worm has definately turned for you man.

Chris puzzled by this expression.

ELIAS (CONT'D)
(smiles)
Feel good?

CHRIS
(a sense of euphoria now)
Yeah. No pain in my neck now. Feels good.

ELIAS
Feelin' good's good enough.

As he sucks in a huge mass of smoke off the bowl. His eyes performing a funny little hop, skip and jump, as he holds it, his face turning red.

The monkey jabbers and jumps around on his neck, worried. Elias then blows the smoke out in its face, the monkey hating it.

The Group laughes.

ELIAS (CONT'D)
Hey Crutcher. I hear you got a Dear John from your gal. Told you she wasn't getting 'nuff from you.

Lerner looks up, stoned out of his mind, wearing a ring in his ear.

LERNER
Shit. Sold me out for some lame dude with a 4-F.

ELIAS
What'd you say her name was again?

LERNER
(recalling her image)
Daisy Mae.

BIG HAROLD
Hey look at Charlotte!

The monkey is sitting quietly stoned, its eyes blinking. Laughter off.

ELIAS
Daisy Mae! What Daisy Mae look like Crutcher?

MANNY
She look huge and got freckles on her ass.

LERNER
She look beautiful.

FRANCIS
How much she weigh man?

BIG HAROLD
She braid her hair under her armpits, Crutcher.

FRANCIS
(sarcastic)
Daisy Mae what?

KING
Daisy Mae Highway, that's what.
(laughing)
Well whatcha want, Lerner, your dick been limp for a year, 'cept when you're bopping your buddy Tony up there.

LERNER
Fuck that.

ELIAS
I fucked this chick in Hawaii man. Couple weeks ago

... Oooooh! Wow - outasight. Gracie Slick man, she looked like Gracie man, I shit you not.
(remembering)

The look on his face ensnares all of them, except perhaps Rhah.

MANNY
What happened man. What whorehouse you go to?

ELIAS
No whorehouse man. On the beach.

FRANCIS
Sure.

ELIAS
Yeah, sure. She walked right by me. Long black hair, tits swinging. Ass like French bread. Legs don't end right.

LERNER
(skeptical)
You can plant that shit in Tennessee man, but it won't come up in Texas.

CRAWFORD
So what she got, hair on her tits.

ELIAS
I just stopped man. My heart's beating like a hardon right I got a hardon sticking through my pants, my bathing suit looks like a hutch ...

BIG HAROLD
I know dat feeling ...

ELIAS
So I'm thinking to myself - Elias you walk away from this, you gonna regret this the rest of your natural life. So I go after her, follow her down the beach. You know find out if she is what she is.

They're all hooked into this now.

KING

And?

ELIAS
Well she was picking up her kids.

MANNY
Dat's dat.

ELIAS
No, dat ain't dat.

FRANCIS
Get outta here, she married ...

ELIAS
Like two hogs in heat. Boy.

Their throats knotting ...

CHRIS
(joining in)
... But what'd she do?

ELIAS
What didn't she do. She fucked the living shit outta me, that's what she did!

CRAWFORD
(sucking in air)
Jesus!

ELIAS
Couldn't get enuff ...

CHRIS
But what'd she actually do?

ELIAS
She was a crossbreed, Chinese and Polish.

BIG HAROLD
What dat?

RHAH
(finally hooked in)
And living in Hawaii man?

ELIAS
Yeah - and has blonde hair and almond-shaped eyes.

FRANCIS
Hey man didn't you say she had black hair?

ELIAS
She had blonde hair man. And long tan legs, in those leather sandals you know, with those thongs up to her knees, this musky oil on it ... mmmm smelled good when they were wrapped around my face ...

They groan, dreaming of Hawaii.

DOC
Yeah!

CHRIS
God!

BIG HAROLD
Please, somebody hold my dick!

ELIAS
(in afterthought)
... and a broken nose.

DOC
Broken man?

ELIAS
Yeah, otherwise she would've been too perfect, y'know what I mean ... some woman. Her name was ...

He forgets it. A grass blackout. Lerner urging him on.

LERNER
Susan?

MANNY
Tamara?

CHRIS
Elizabeth?

Elias shaking his head, trying to remember.

KING
Merle?

RHAH
Merle? Jesus! ... Patty?

BIG HAROLD
Inga?

CHRIS
Jennifer?

HOYT
Connie?

Elias snapping his fingers.

ELIAS
Dawn! That was it!

CHRIS
(repeating it)
Dawn ...

King listening to the sound of it.

KING
Dawn?

The others nodding, musing over it.

BIG HAROLD
Yeah, Dawn ...

INT. THE BARRACKS - NIGHT

In comparison to the darkness of the hooch, a highly lit atmosphere, attracting bugs ... dusty gear lying around a disordered hooch, loud and finger-snapping COUNTRY WESTERN MUSIC playing from a tape deck, a well-known tune, circa 1967.

BUNNY, the 18 year-old angel face, totters drunk with a Colt-45 beer in hand, over to JUNIOR, the badass black kid with the zits,

who just lies there on his cot sweating, doing nothing.

BUNNY
(listening to the music)
Listen to that shit, that's good shit!

JUNIOR
(irritated as always)
Fuck that redneck noise, dude. All dem chicks be rappin' how dey losin' der' ho's and how dey ain't got no bread for beer. Fuck dat honky shit. Got to get me some motown jams, dig it?

BUNNY
(doesn't understand a word of it)
Whaddaya talking shit for man. Hey Junior! Y'ever smoke any shit?

JUNIOR
Das right dude. You be tryin' to string de black man out on dat shit and keep him DOWN. Time's be coming, my man, when de black man's gonna throw off that yoke.

BUNNY
(lonely in his way for company)
Say I can dig it. Smoke that shit everything kinda gets weird y'know?
(hiccups, sits)
Y'hear that story the gooks is putting chemicals in the grass so's we become 'pacifists' so's we don fight
(to no one in particular)
Where the hell's everybody, they'se gettin high that's what - bunch of hopheads, they think they special ...

JUNIOR
(turns away, bored)
Don you worry Bunny, youse a killer anyway.

BUNNY
Yeah but I still like a piece of pussy once in a while - ain't nothing like a piece of pussy cept

maybe the Indie 500.

JUNIOR
Youse so fucked up man.

BUNNY
Y'ever look at yoself in the mirror Junior, youse uglier than a dick on a dog man.
(laughing)

JUNIOR
Yeah, you had a piece of pussy on a plate in front of you, you'd probably kill it.

BUNNY
Shit, I bet I been laid more'n you have.

JUNIOR
Sure, you probably stick it in tween her knees and think youse there.

BUNNY
Yeah?

JUNIOR
Only way you'd get some pussy is your bitch dies and wills it to you - and then maybe.

Lt. WOLFE wanders down the aisle, beer in hand, slightly lonely, bypassing FU SHENG, the Hawaiin and TONY, a mustached hairy-browed Italian kid from Boston, who are playing some kind of dice game. They hardly acknowledge the Lieutenant who stops by RODRIGUEZ, the Mexican-American kid who is on his cot in his neatly arranged area writing a letter home with a pencil, forming his words with his mouth, as always minding his own business. Religious objects comprise his few decorations.

LIEUTENANT WOLFE
(amiable)
How you doing Rodriguez?

RODRIGUEZ
Good sir.

WOLFE

Need anything?

RODRIGUEZ
No sir.

Wolfe winks at him, continues on to the POKER GAME going on in the center of the barracks, the main action. BARNES, Sgts.O'NEILL and WARREN, the quiet sullen black, SANDERSON and SAL play as ACE, the tiny radio kid, and MOREHOUSE look on; all of them drinking beer and bourbon chasers from a bottle.

WOLFE
(to O'Neill)
How's it going Red?
(using his nickname)

O'NEILL
Shit, cocksucker's got all the cards tonight.

WOLFE
(to Barnes)
Looks like you're doing all right Sergeant.

Barnes, raking in the chips, is the big winner, a light bead of sweat on his forehead and a somewhat glassy look to the eye the only indication he is drunk - his shirt peeled off revealing a muscular, scarred body.

BARNES
Yeah, and I ain't even cheating yet.

SANDERSON
(the big blond kid)
Have some Kentucky windage Lieutenant.
(passes him the bottle of bourbon)

Wolfe takes a nip.

BARNES
Play Lieutenant?

WOLFE
Nah, I wouldn't want to get raped by you guys ...

O'NEILL

What are you saving up to be Lieutenant - Jewish?

Laughes. Wolfe forces a smile, glad to move on. There is a continual worried rodent air about him, an anxiety, a desire to fill the vacuum in his leadership with a false masculinity.

WOLFE
Catch you men later. Enjoy yourselves.

As he goes, O'Neill shakes his head after him.

O'NEILL
Sorry ass motherfucker ain't he. You think he gonna make it Barnes?

Barnes plays a card, glances, a minute movement of his head.

O'NEILL (CONT'D)
Yeah that's what I figger. Some dudes you jes' look in their faces and you KNOW they just ain't gonna make it.

Barnes looks - with some irony - at O'Neill. The Country Western tune has reached a crescendo whine which now mixes into:

INT. UNDERWORLD HUTCH - NIGHT

Francis, the baby-faced black, and Manny, green shades covering his skinny face, lead with a high blues falsetto.

FRANCIS AND MANNY
(singing)
'People say I'm the life of the party cause I tell a joke or two Although I may be laughing loud and hardy Deep inside I'm blue ...

The Hutch looks now like a Turkish bath with minimum visibility, the smoke fumes dense. They are all up dancing on their feet - King, Tubbs, Big Harold, Hoyt, Lerner, Crawford, Flash, Doc, Elias - a few light gestures with their hands above shoulder level, passing around the grass pipes while they shuffle, fingers clicking. The song - Smokey Robinson's "Tracks of My Tears" - accompanies them from a vintage tapedeck.

ALL

'... Since you've left me, if you've seen me with another girl seeming like I'm having fun although she may be cute she's just a substitute because you're the permanent one ...'

King and Big Harold wave Chris into the Circle and he starts swaying with them, feeling as if he's being accepted into a new family.

Rhah watches it all, puffing away on his magic dragon pipe, the shadows dancing on the walls.

It looks like a Saturday night dance party. A yearning for tenderness, for feminity, for a moment of peace in this nightmare life. Their eyes closed, thinking of dance partners that can't be here tonight. Singing their souls out.

ALL (CONT'D)
'... So take a good look at my face. You'll see the smile looks out of place. Look a little bit closer. It's easy to trace. The tracks of my tears...'

EXT. JUNGLE - NVA BUNKER COMPLEX - DAY

An overwhelming 103 degree heat. Chris is once more on point, a little better now but obviously struggling with a thick unyielding bamboo thicket that forces him forward in a caveman crouch. Napalm jelly is hanging from the trees in great canopies of spider webs, obliterating the sky.

CHRIS (V.O.)
New Year's Day, 1968. Just another day. Staying alive. There's been a lot of movement neat the Cambodian border, regiments of NVA moving across. A lot of little firefights, ambushes, we drop a lot of bombs, then we walk through the napalm like ghosts in a landscape ...

Chris working his way over twisted, broken stumps, branches. On the back of his flak jacket he's written, 'If I die bury me upside down so the whole world can kiss my ass'.

BARNES
Pssst!

The signal for silence. Chris freezes. Barnes edging up to him.

BARNES (CONT'D)
(whispers)
Bunker ...

CHRIS
Where?

Doesn't see it. Following Barnes' imperceptible movement of his head.

The bunker, dug into the ground and camouflaged with brush, is staring right at him, not more than 20 feet away. Chris is a dead man if ...

Barnes, checking the terrain, signals radioman Hoyt.

Barnes edging up to the bunker, eyes everywhere. Chris following. The tension builds. They come up to the edge of it, peer in. Nothing.

Barnes walks around it, slips in from back. Chris covers him, other guys coming up now, making a small perimeter.

Chris now starts to see things he didn't see. Right in front of his nose - there is a trench from this bunker to another and another. There is now in his view a complex of bunkers and thatched hootches and lean-tos all blending into the forest. A ghost city ...

Elias and others fanning out now, careful ... whispered conversations in the wind.

Chris moves past a rope with freshly washed laundry stretching between two trees, clothes stirring in the wind. He looks up as King points out a treehouse, then looks down as Lerner whispers something and points - NVA rucksacks are laid out on the ground in an orderly platoon-sized pattern.

CUT TO:

INT. NVA BUNKER - TUNNEL POSITION - DAY

Elias goes down into a dangerous-looking TUNNEL, on a rope with a

.45. Barnes watching him. We sense Elias loves the danger, smiling.

EXT. NVA BUNKER - COMPLEX - MAIN POSITION - DAY

Lt. Wolfe signals Manny and Chris out onto the two flanks.

INT. NVA TREEHOUSE - DAY

Rhah and King explore a treehouse. Rice stores. Rhah, an experienced soldier, seems tense, moves cautiously, expecting booby traps.

EXT. NVA BUNKER - WARREN'S POSITION - DAY

Sgt. Warren cautiously explores another bunker, probing a little tunnel in the bottom of it with a stick. Bunny, having a small frame, goes down into it, fearless.

EXT. NVA BUNKER - MANNY'S POSITION - DAY

Manny, the skinny black boy with the coloured beads, is out on flank - alone, smoking a cigarette, humming.

EXT. NVA BUNKER - CHRIS' POSITION - DAY

On the other flank, Chris, also alone, waits, listening to the sounds of the jungle. He too is smoking a cigarette. The eeriness is everywhere. Rays of morning light peeking through the cathedral dome of the jungle. Bird calls.

INT. NVA TUNNEL - DAY

Elias climbs deeper and deeper into the hole, a rope attached to his waist leading out to the surface, his flashlight now coming around on a shaftway demarcating a TUNNEL that seems to stretch for at least 100 yards. The light revealing cobwebs all along it, but tall enough for a small man.

EXT. CHRIS' POSITION - DAY

It's quiet, weird. Chris takes his pants down, squats. He thinks he hears something, tenses.

There is a soft rustling sound now. And as he focuses on it he realizes it is coming from very close to him. Something light

and sinuous moving over the leaves. He looks down.

A bright yellow and orange-ringed krait viper is crawling right between his two legs. It stops, senses another life standing over it.

Chris frozen with dread.

The snake crawls on, pulling its long, long 15 foot body behind it.

On Chris, eyes dilated, slowly regaining his breath looking around everywhere now.

INT. NVA TUNNEL - DAY

Elias moving down the tunnel, fearless. We expect something any moment to come out and nail him but nothing does. He stops. His flashlight revealing a kitchen and an NVA hospital set up. A hammock swings as if someone just deserted it. In another hammock is a dead man. Elias advances cautiously.

EXT. NVA BUNKER - COMPLEX - SANDERSON POSITION - DAY

Spec 4 Sanderson, the big handsome blond kid, is moving through an abandoned bunker. With him is Sal, a tough street kid with an intense face, all whiskered. Sanderson noticing now a metal box of 50-caliber ammo, U.S. marking, half-buried in the ground.

SANDERSON
Hey look at that.

He opens the case. Official-looking documents are inside, they glance through them, lighting cigarettes, the search over, successful, they relax.

SAL
(a worried type)
Leave it willya - it's gook shit.

SANDERSON
Nah this stuff's important.

He puts the documents back in the ammo case, lifts it. It's the last thing he ever does.

EXT. NVA BUNKER - SANDERSON POSITION - DAY

The ensuing explosion shakes the ground, obliterating both boys, brances, smoke and dust flying out.

EXT. NVA BUNKER - CHRIS POSITION - DAY

Out on flank, Chris hits the ground, hugs it.

EXT. NVA BUNKER - COMPLEX - SANDERSON POSTION - DAY

Barnes runs up. Black smoke sweeping through the trees. Sal suddenly appears, stepping out of the smoke, stunned. The front of his body is soaked in blood from a thousand shrapnel holes, his clothes shredded, he stares at Barnes, dazed. Both his arms are gone and blood is geysering out like a water fountain. He crumbles - dead or dying.

BARNES
Corpsman!

He runs over to Sal, gets a hold of his face in a vicelike grip, enraged, tries to yell some sense into him.

BARNES (CONT'D)
(directly to Sal)
Goddamit! Are you fucking kids ever gonna learn!
Don't you understand how easy it is to die!

The Doc running up - one look tells us all we need to know.

DOC
Holy Jesus!

EXT. NVA BUNKER COMPLEX - MAIN POSITION - DAY

Lt. Wolfe, shaken, is on the radio with Cpt. Harris, words garbled through the air, trying to describe a primal horror.

EXT. NVA BUNKER COMPLEX - SANDERSON POSITION - DAY

Barnes moving through the wreckage - sees severed limbs sticking in a sandbag.

EXT. NVA BUNKER COMPLEX - MAIN POSITION - DAY

Rhah crouches over a piece of leg tied into a hipbone and a rib.

EXT. NVA BUNKER COMPLEX - DAY

Elias coming out of the tunnel, filthied.

EXT. NVA BUNKER - MAIN POSITION - DAY

Elias coming abreast of Wolfe.

ELIAS
Tell Six we need engineers here, this pos. is crawling with traps.

WOLFE
They're on their way ...
(consulting his map)
There's a gook village half a klik downriver, Battalion wants us to move in and search it ASAP, something's going on ... where's Barnes?

INT. NVA BUNKER - SANDERSON POSITION - DAY

Barnes is still there in the wrecked bunker, squatting there staring as if his mind has disconnected for a moment. He reaches up, touches his scars. The look on his face suggests he is deeply wronged by this tragedy, that he is taking it very personally.

EXT. NVA BUNKER - MAIN POSITION - DAY

Chris watches him from outside the bunker, awed.

Barnes notices Chris watching him, takes a breath, stands.

BARNES
You gonna sit there and play with yourself Taylor or you gonna be part of my war ... Awright, saddle up, let's go - Tubbs you got point.

The men moving into jungle formation, silently.

Chris walking over into line, stops for a moment - noticing a freshly-severed eyeball partially buried in dirt, staring up at him. He turns away, sickened.

EXT. NVA BUNKER COMPLEX - MAIN POSITION - DAY

O'NEILL
Where's Manny?

WARREN
Manny! ... Hey Buchanan.

There is no answer. The men in the platoon start to look at each other, sensing more trouble.

Elias heads into the bush after him. Barnes watches him go.

Francis, his friend, and Tubbs and King follow.

FRANCIS
Hey man whatcha doing ... where you at? Get your black ass back in here!

EXT. NVA BUNKER COMPLEX - MANNY'S POSITION - DAY

Out on the flank position, where he once stood, Elias walks out, looks. The jungle is silent once again. Francis, Tubbs, King follow. The others - Barnes, Lt.Wolfe, Warren, Chris, Rhah ...

FRANCIS AND OTHERS
(whispering loudly)
Manny? ... Manny?

Their voices trailing off. Bird cries come back.

Elias combing the ground for clues ... nothing.

Chris looking on, can't believe it, none of them can, a collective chill running through the platoon.

EXT. JUNGLE - DAY

The Platoon moving downslope in the Jungle, their faces grim, quiet, deadly. King is on point.

CHRIS (V.O.)
We had to get to the village before dark so we left Elias with some men to keep looking and to wait for the engineers ... But it was King who found him ...

about 1000 yards downriver, not far from the village - It was the end of the mystery.

A moving shot approaching Manny. He's trussed with rope, arms behind his back. Throat cut, eyes startled open, mouth shaped in a scream of terror.

Barnes, the other men looking ... Chris. Barnes says it for everyone, 'The motherfuckers ...'

EXT. VILLAGE - TRAIL - DAY

They come up out of the jungle onto the side of a CART TRAIL, where a tiny village overlooks the river. The VILLAGE is poor, a series of thatched hutches made of C-ration cardboard and aluminum beer can sidings, faint whiffs of smoke coming from cook fires. Pigs and dogs wander about.

An OLD VILLAGER watches them pass from his tillable plot, smoking a cigarette, one leg wrapped around his hoe, resting, no expression.

CHRIS (V.O.)
... the village, which had stood for maybe a thousand years, didn't know we were coming that day. If they had they would have run ... Barnes was at the eye of our rage - and through him, our Captain Ahab - we would set things right again. That day we loved him ...

A pig loiters along the trail, rooting.

Bunny coming up on it with a smile.

BUNNY
Hey pig, pig - come here, pig, pig.

The pig grunts. Bunny leveling his shotgun, fires point blank. A horrible squeal.

Chris, directly behind him, looks disgusted.

EXT. VILLAGE - DAY

Tony suddenly points, excited, calls to Barnes.

TONY
There goes one!

Their POV - a young VILLAGER fleeing down the slope.

Barnes doesn't hesitate, nails him with a short volley of well-placed shots.

BARNES
(to Tony)
Check him out.

He turns back into the village.

EXT. VILLAGE - DAY

Troops fanning out over the village, some TWO DOZEN VILLAGERS scattering to collect their children, dogs barking.

SGTS.O'NEIL AND WARREN
Get em out! Get em out!

EXT. VILLAGE TUNNEL - DAY

In another part of the village, Barnes hovers over a hole leading into some kind of tunnel.

BARNES
Get out of there you fuckheads move! Move!

Fires a warning shot. Three VILLAGERS climbing out of the spider hole, arms raised, but not showing any emotion. Barnes turning to his radioman Hoyt and Big Harold accompanying.

BARNES (CONT'D)
(to Harold)
Put'em in the pig pen.
(to Hoyt)
There's more down there. Gimme your Willy Pete.

Hoyt, with reluctance in his eyes, hands over a specially shaped grenade.

Barnes stands over the hole, the grenade in hand.

The three VILLAGERS who just came out of the hole, yell from the distance, to others still in the tunnel, pleading with them to come out.

BARNES (CONT'D)
FIRE IN THE HOLE!

Barnes throws the phosphorus in. A muted EXPLOSION. Then sizzling acidic fumes. Frying sounds. A hideous scream from somewhere deep in the hole.

Hoyt, watching, is sickened. Barnes businesslike.

The Villagers, in grief, howl and tear at their faces.

FU SHENG
(hustling up to Barnes)
Sarge, we found some shit!

Barnes going with him.

EXT. VILLAGE - OUTSIDE HUTCH - DAY

The sun is sittin there hot and high in the sky.

Chris, strangling in heat, a demented look on his face, staggers into a hutch with Francis.

INT. HUTCH - VILLAGE - DAY

Threadbare, poor, a typical Buddhist shrine in the corner, motes of light crisscross through the poor matting and c-ration sides.

Chris edges over, pries up a floorboard, flips it over, scared.

There's a tunnel inside. A long dark dangerous hole.

CHRIS
La Dai! La Dai! GET THE FUCK OUTTA THERE!

FRANCIS
Hey take it easy man. They're scared.

CHRIS
They're scared? What about me! I'm sick of this shit man, I"m sick of this shit! They don't want us

here! Who do you think they're fighting for! GET OUTTA THERE!

Francis doesn't recognize him in his rage. Bunny now coming in, followed by O'Neill, drawn by the shouting.

EXT. VILLAGE - WEAPONS CACHE - DAY

Barnes stares down at a WEAPONS CACHE buried cleverly underneath the ruce urns. Ace, Fu Sheng, Sgt.Warren, Lt.Wolfe, others, are digging it out. It's in white plastic wrappings - a load of AK-47's, rockets, grenades, claymores, carbines, flares, NVA uniforms. A real find.

SGT. WARREN
(to Barnes)
... and over here there's enough rice to feed a whole fuckin' regiment ...

Barnes walking with him over to an undercover rice silo being dug out by Tubbs and Junior. Barnes looks it over.

BARNES
(to Warren)
... bring the honcho over here.
(to Tubb and Junior)
Burn it.

INT. HUTCH - VILLAGE - DAY

An Old Woman and her Son, a young man with one leg, throw up their hands, climbing out of the hole with stupid confused looks as Chris, shaking with his own sort of confusion and rage, cuffs them, hustling them out. The Young Man uses a pair of crutches for his blown-off limb, hobbling like a mangy three-legged dog.

BUNNY
Hey look at this! Ma and Pa Kettle here. Look at them - greasy gook motherfuckers!

CHRIS
Get up out of there! ... You see I didn't wanna hurt you. Why didn't you come out, when I said so hunh! Why? WHY! WHY? DON'T YOU LISTEN ... WHAT ARE YOU SMILING AT HUNH! FUCKING ASSHOLES!

The couple, hands raised, muttering things in Vietnamese, don't understand a word, shaking their heads stupidly and smiling that impassive Oriental smile which sends Chris into a rage only he can understand.

His finger closes on the trigger of his 16.

Francis, the baby-faced black, looks nervously, sensing the danger ... Bunny amused, drawn in by Chris. O'Neill watches passively from the lip of the hutch.

The Young Man continues to grin, not seeming to realize the degree of danger he's in, which is what Chris wants - a token sign of acquiescence. There is also the added element of showing off his manhood in front of an audience now.

BUNNY
Do 'em man, do 'em.

Chris. The trigger. He pulls. But he can't quite bring himself to kill. The bullets exploding in the dirt at the edges of the young man's foot.

CHRIS
(demonic)
DANCE YOU ONE-LEGGED MOTHERFUCKER, DANCE!!!

The Young Man hops up and down in a reflex fear of the sounds of the bullets as they thud into the dirt. Yet his eyes remain fixed on Chris in wonderment.

Chris, firing out the magazine, seems to expend his bloodlust. He ceases, noticing - for the first time - the eyes of the Young Man. They aren't stupid - nor fearful - but filled with resignation and despair - a despair that Chris, in disgust of himself, recognizes.

Chris lowers the rifle, silent.

The Young Man's impassive face shines now with tears. That sad young look - as if death itself would've been a release. Chris turns his eyes away, an awkward sense of shame.

FRANCIS

(leaves)
Let's get out of here man.

But Bunny takes up the slack, moves forward on the young man.

BUNNY
(to Chris)
You chickenshit man, they're laughing at you, look at them faces. That's the way a gook laughs.

The Young Man nodding affable to Bunny and mumbling ingratiating words in Vietnamese.

BUNNY (CONT'D)
Yeah sure you are, you're real sorry ain't you. You're just crying out your hearts about Sandy and Sal and Manny - they're laughing at us! Their family is out there in the fucking bush blowing us away and they're laughing at us!

O'NEILL
(checking out the hutch)
Forget it will ya, let's go ...

Chris standing there, watching, sensing something awful is going to come and unable to do anything about it. It comes - suddenly and without warning. Bunny is looking at O'Neill, the Vietnamese couple are muttering something. In one fluid move, Bunny swivels and with unbelievable savagery clubs the young one-legged man in the side of the head with the butt of his 16.

O'NEILL (CONT'D)
(stunned)

Hey what are you doing!

BUNNY
Fucker!

The young man is groaning on the floor of the hutch. Bunny smashes him - again and again.

BUNNY (CONT'D)
That's for Sandy! And this is for Sal! And this is for fucking Manny! This is for me!

Chris watches, horrified. Never in his life has he seen something so horrifying as this. And yet he does nothing. He is part of it.

BUNNY (CONT'D)
(stepping back, examines what's left of the head, amazed)
Wow! You see his fucking head come apart? Look at that ... I never seen brains like dat before. Jesus fucking Christ ...

The Old Lady is shrieking, hovering over the body of her son. Bunny studying her.

BUNNY (CONT'D)
Betcha the old bitch runs the whole show. Probably helped cut Manny's throat. Probably cut my balls off if she could.
(to Chris)
Come on, man, let's do her.

She cowers from him. Chris steps back, horrified. As is O'Neill, more puzzled than horrified.

BUNNY (CONT'D)
(hitting her again)
Let's zap all these motherfuckers! Let's do the whole village!

He backs out of the hutch, scared. Evidently Bunny is temporarily insane. But he spots O'Neill, yells at him.

BUNNY (CONT'D)
GET BACK HERE YOU FUCKING COWARD O'NEILL. THIS IS FOR SANDY ... THIS IS FOR SANDY MAN! AND SAL! AND MANNY!

As he clubs her to death.

On Chris' face, blood and brain tissue flying up into it.

EXT. CENTRAL AREA - VILLAGE - DAY

A tiny knot of men are ringed around Barnes who is questioning a sturdy-looking man who is the VILLAGE CHIEF. He has been

stripped of his shirt, scars all over his body, scared. He has his ID papers out, trembling, showing them to Lerner who speaks some pidgen Vietnamese.

BARNES
Where'd he get these wounds?

Lerner translates, the man talking back.

LERNER
He says he was hit in a bombing raid.

TONY
He's a dink fosure.

BARNES
Ask him what the weapons are doing here?

LERNER
He says they had no choice. The NVA killed the old honcho when he said no. He says the rice is theirs.

BARNES
Bullshit ... who the hell was the dink we just nailed on the riverbank?

Chris and O'Neill come up, watch. Others coming from different places - sensing the narrowing drama. But half the platoon is still at work in the village. We hear shouts, grenade explosions, occasionally gunfire.

LERNER
... He says he doesn't know, NVA haven't been around in a couple of months. Maybe it was a scout or ...

The men around Barnes grumble.

BARNES
Yeah sure it was. What about all that fucking rice and the weapons ... who they for?
(looking at the Village Chief)
Cocksucker knows what I'm saying ... don't you Pop?
(a blank look)

ACE

You're goddamn right he does!

Lerner translating. The Village Chief's WIFE is now on the scene, a middle-aged woman with angry features, yelling at Lerner trying to answer for her husband, a high-pitched barrage of indignant words directed mostly at Barnes, and interspersed with the spitting of her betel nuts on the ground.

The Village Chief trying to talk her down. But things are definitely getting out of control. And the heat from the sun is only aggravating the situation, pounding down on the actors in the drama, their fatigues soaked in sweat and anger.

LERNER
(finally)
He swears he doesn't know anything! He hates the NVA but they come when they want and ...

JUNIOR
He's lying through his teeth!

TONY
Waste the fucker, then see who talks.

BARNES
What's the bitch saying?

LERNER
(overwhelmed)
She's going on, I don't know - why are we shooting the pigs, they're farmers ... they got to make a living, all that crap ...

The Woman is still ranting when Barnes turns to her, quite casually levels his M-16, and puts a bullet in her head. She goes down as if pole-axed.

A stunned pause. The Chief looking at his wife. The Villagers in background reacting.

Wolfe looking ... Chris looking, shocked. Doc, possibly the straightest of them all, very uncomfortable. They are all shocked insome way, but do nothing against the power of Banres. Barnes walks over to the pig pen with the other Villagers, very casually, confronts them.

BARNES
(to Lerner)
Tell him he talks or I'm gonna waste more of 'em.

Lerner shaken up, muttering to the Village Chief who is in shock, kneeling next to the body of his wife, muttering in a high whine of pain.

BARNES (CONT'D)
Go ahead, Lerner, ask him.

A group of Villagers huddle to one side.

Lerner, shaken, is yelling at all of them, demanding an answer.

LERNER
They don't know Sarge, they don't know!
(half believes it)

Barnes turns his attention on the other villagers, his intentions apparent. Everybody feels them. They're next. Barnes is unperturbed, very much in command of the situation, no rage, no emotions expressed.

Chris has never seen such a thing in his life - but can't react. Can't stop it, just watches it like he's not quite there.

The same goes for Lieutenant Wolfe, for all of them. The very outrageousness of Barns' killing seems to quell all protest.

ACE
(sensing the impending massacre)
Hey Sarge can we get in on this.

Tony advances, the hairy Italian kid from Boston.

TONY
Let's go all the way, let's go for it! Let's do the whole fucking village. Come on, Sarge.

Chris' eyes ... Rodriguez next to him, is neutral but willing.

Francis is hesitant.

Fu Sheng and Junior are ready to go for it. Lt.Wolfe is

powerless, frozen.

Sgt.Warren stepping up. The massacre is just about to break.

The Villagers know it, kneel in prayer, mutter.

Barnes suddenly grabs and drags a young 19 year-old Woman, the Village Chief's daughter, across the pen, throws her down on her knees, in front of the stunned Village Chief. She's screaming.

BARNES
This his daughter, right?

Lerner nods. Barnes pulls his .45, puts it alongside her head.

BARNES (CONT'D)
(to Village Chief)
You lie ... You Vee Cee ... I caca ado Vee Cee!

He chambers the .45, the Woman begging Barnes for her life, cradling his knees. He sticks the gun down above her skull.

Chris wanting to cry out, to do something - but can't!

A FIGURE suddenly flares out in the sun, advancing on them. It is Elias.

ELIAS
BARNES!!

Barnes looks around. They all look around.

Elias walks right up to him, followed by his men - King, Rhah, Crawford, others from the rear party. He looks around. The corpse of the Wife ... the Young Daughter sobbing.

ELIAS (CONT'D)
WHAT THE FUCK YOU DOING!

BARNES
(pissed)
Stay out of this Elias. This ain't your show.

ELIAS
YOU AIN'T A FIRING SQUAD, YOU PIECE OF SHIT!!

The stock of his rifle swings up fast and hard smacking Barnes full in the face, breaking two teeth.

Barnes staggers back, hurt, bleeding. Elias is on him like a leopard. Battering him with his fists.

They struggle in the dust, two titans, their faces equally consumed with rage, clawing, spitting, punching, kicking, pounding each other's skulls in the dirt. A dust storm swirls around them, the men closing around like excited apes at a bloodfeast.

Most of the men seem to be pulling for Barnes - Chris just watching neutral.

LIEUTENANT WOLFE
BREAK IT UP! ELIAS! BARNES!

But they rool on, smashing each other's faces in. Both quick, fast, agile, mean fighters. Sgts.O'Neill and Warren drag them apart.

BARNES
You're dead, you're fucking dead Elias!

ELIAS
YOU - you're going to fuckin' jail, buddy, you ain't getting away with this one!!!!!

WOLFE
All right! All right! All right!!! NOW BREAK IT UP. LET'S GO ...

They compose themselves, the Villagers looking on, grieving over their loss.

WOLFE (CONT'D)
Alright, Six says torch this place! Blow the weapons in place. Round up all suspected Vee Cees and shake it up! We ain't got much light left.

ELIAS
(to Wolfe)
Why the fuck didn't you do something Lieutenant!

WOLFE
What are you talking about!
(turns away, goes about his business)

ELIAS
(spins him around)
You know what I'm talking about!

WOLFE
No I don't. I don't know what the fuck you're talking about, Elias!
(goes)

Who wants to be reminded? A silence of shame. The Men moving away, Warren, Ace, Tony, Rodriguez, Barnes looking back once, a cold glare.

The Village Chief is a broken-looking man, huddled over his wife's body.

Elias stands there, frustrated.

Chris glances at him, moves out.

EXT. SMALL VILLAGE - DAY

A zippo cigarette lighter with the engraved initials: 'From Mai lin to my Bunny Boy'. It sparks a thick flare as Bunny lights the dry straw on the roof of the Hutch where he killed the Old Woman and Young Boy.

Their legs sticking out at the threshold. The hooch burning fast, aided by the strong sun.

Bunny watches with awe.

EXT. SMALL VILLAGE - DAY

Sgt.Warren and Rodriguez lighting another hooch on fire.

EXT. VILLAGE RICE STORE - DAY

Fu Sheng yelling 'FIRE IN THE HOLE!' throws white phosphorus into the rice stores.

EXT. VILLAGE - WEAPONS CACHE - DAY

Barnes and Huffmeister, a big German kid from Texas, are laying the cord to blow the weapons cache.

EXT. SMALL VILLAGE - WELL - DAY

Adams and Parker are poisoning the well with a white phosphorus grenade: 'FIRE IN THE HOLE!'

EXT. SMALL VILLAGE - DAY

Wolfe, Ace, Tubbs, Warren, Rogriguez rope the DOZEN SUSPECTED VILLAGERS together to take them back for questioning.

Elias watches the Villagers mourn their losses. In the background, explosions, hooches popping with flames, the yells of the violations of the Village winding down.

EXT. SMALL VILLAGE - DAY

Chris wanders through this wreckage in the sun, like a dazed visitor from another planet, not believing it. He sees something, goes towards it - knows what it is.

EXT. VILLAGE - EDGE OF WOODLINE - DAY

Hidden at the edge of the woodline, King hands back a bowl of grass to Rhah, the chief head. They're puffing away.

KING
Whew! - where that come from?

RHAH
Found it. Growing in a garden.

KING
(smokes)
Sheeit, beats burning hutches anyway ...

They meditatively look out at the Village - burning hutches sending up spirals of smoke. Shouts. Shots. Chaos.

RHAH
Yeah - stoned's the way to be ...

EXT. VILLAGE - DITCH - DAY

In a ditch running alongside the Village, partially concealed by foliage and anthills, Tony, Morehouse, and the ubiquitous Bunny have a 12-YEAR-OLD VIETNAMESE GIRL pinned to the ground, gagged and squirming, naked. They are fucking her to death. Junior looks on, both curious and disgusted, but doesn't take part.

TONY
Take her up the ass ...

As they roll her over, like excited dogs in heat.

Chris, coming up, sees their heads dipping up and down on the other side of the anthill, knows what they're doing. He makes a conscious decision to do something. He runs over.

CHRIS
LET HER GO! YOU HEAR ME! YOU ASSHOLE! LET HER GO!

He strides right into them, shoves them off hard. The girl is in tears.

TONY
What the fuck you want - she's a dink.

CHRIS
NO - YOU STUPID FUCK ... DON'T ... DON'T ... YOU TOO BUNNY. MOREHOUSE. OFF! NO! DON'T ... DON'T!

He seems disconnected, dazed by the sun, like he's talking to dogs - loud, repetitive words coming out of an anger he can barely control, trying to restore some sanity to a world gone totally nuts today. Don't they understand? Don'tthey have any sense of a mind? Any kind of decency?

The Men looking at him as if he's the one who's gone nuts, not them. Bunny looking at Morehouse looking at Tony looking at Junior. The irony is lost on them, as Chris pushes through to help the poor girl put her scanty clothes back on.

CHRIS (CONT'D)
(to the girl)
It's okay ... it's okay ...

Elias appears behind Bunny and the others, sees what's happened.

He signals them to move out.

ELIAS
Get outta here.

The men grumble and slink off quietly. Elias watching as...

Chris helps her to her feet, wounded in the intestines, she can barely stand, blood saoking in her nether regions. Chris slings her up as gently as he can and carries her.

CHRIS
(as if to himself)
It's okay, it's okay ...

EXT. VILLAGE - PIG PEN - DAY

Near the pig pen, a DOZEN SUSPECTS are being led away on ropes by Tubbs, Warren, Rodriguez. The others left behind look back at their village in ruins, homes burning, livestock dead or scattered, belongings thrown and broken in the dirt. BABIES wail, the adults squat there on their heels watching with absolutely no trace of outward emotion.

Past this Bosch-like canvas, Chris - carrying the girl - walks dazed by the horrors of this long afternoon.

EXT. VILLAGE TRAIL - DAY

The soldiers depart the village. A huge EXPLOSION now rocks the earth and sends a spray of smoke into the blue sky as the weapons cache explodes in stages that sound like the end of the world.

EXT. PERIMETER #2 - JUNGLE - LATE AFTERNOON DUSK

The Company is digging into another overnight perimeter on a ridge with a view of the Valley where the Village was. C-Ration fires all around the perimeter.

EXT. COMPANY CP - DUSK -- MORNING

At the Company,l Elias, Captain Harris, Barnes, Lt.Wolfe are huddled. Close on Harris, looking from face to face, assuming a judicial attitude.

CAPTAIN HARRIS

... and you Lieutenant?

LIEUTENANT WOLFE
I didn't see anything sir.

ELIAS
I did.

LIEUTENANT WOLFE
That dink was reported to me as NVA sir by Sergeant Barnes. Sergeant Barnes.

Squirreling out of any responsibility.

ELIAS
My report sir, will include Lt.Wolfe as being witness to the shooting ...

CAPTAIN HARRIS
All right, Elias. Sergeant Barnes, I want a report from you ...

BARNES
You got it sir - and I can throw in plenty of eye-witnesses if you want sir ...

HARRIS
Not now. We'll get into this when we get back to base camp. Right now I need every man in the field, I want your guys to stick together ... Elias? Barnes? ... You hear me? This is no time for fighting with each other.
(pause, they nod)
Tomorrow we're going back into that bunker complex - from the East.
(continuing)
First Platoon will lead ... Brigade thinks they might be back there tomorrow. That's all ... Get some rest.
(turns away)

Barnes, Elias eye each other and move off.

EXT. PERIMETER #2 - DUSK

Wolfe walks alongside Barnes.

WOLFE
Don't worry about it Sergeant, he won't be able to prove a thing, he's a troublemaker but ...

Barnes is obviously worried, although he doesn't let on.

BARNES
Elias' a waterwalker ... like them politicians in Washington. Want to fight their war with one hand tied round their balls. Ain't no time or need for a courtroom out here ...

Wolfe leaves him as Barnes turns into his foxhole where Bunny and O'Neill await him anxiously.

O'NEILL
How'd it go.

Banres shrugs.

BUNNY
Thataway Sarge, fuckin' Elias man, fuckin' squeal that's what he is, gonna get everybody in the platoon in shit. Somebody oughta fix his ass ...

Barnes fixing his coffee.

O'NEILL
(worried)
Gonna be an investigation or something Bob?

Barnes says nothing, a cryptic look.

O'Neill worried, Bunny, taking his cue from Barnes, slaps him on the back.

BUNNY
Ya worry too much O'Neill ...

EXT. PERIMETER #2 - CHRIS' POSITION - DUSK

Elsewhere on the perimeter, Chris is digging out a foxhole with Rhah, as King and Lerner prepare the C's for dinner.

RHAH
I know Barnes six months and I'll tell ya something - that man is MEAN, red in his soul like a dick on a dog.

KING
Barnes gets killed, his jaws'd go on clacking ...

CHRIS
Where's he form?

RHAH
Barnes comes from Hell.

LERNER
Tennessee someplace. Hill country.

RHAH
Barnes took a bullet right there. At Ia Drang Valley ...
(points to his forehead)
And the cocksucker SURVIVED - that's BAAAD man.
That's his high, baby. High on WAR!

His eyes flare out dramamtically. Chris, enthralled in spite of himself.

KING
He done a year in Japan in the hospital, then when he gets out, the first thing he done is re-up. Four years he been in the field ...

RHAH
... and you know how many times he done been shot?
(Chris shakes his head)
Seven times!
(with his fingers)
Seven.

CHRIS
And he still wanted to come back?

LERNER
Does a pee wee wanna take a wee wee?

RHAH
The Good Lord works his revenge in strange ways.

KING
Yeah, you done said it. Revenge on US.

CHRIS
Does he have a metal plate in his head?

RHAH
(smiles)
You mean he's crazy? No more crazy'n the rest of us been out in the bush too long.

LERNER
Well he ain't normal that's fosure.

RHAH
That's what he is ... Baaaa!

His hand flashes forward in front of Chris. 'HATE' is written across the left hand knuckles in a sloppy, purplish-black tatoo. Chris looking at it.

RHAH (CONT'D)
... and he's FILLED with it. He's roaming these jungles looking for little yellow devils to kill. Remember the Devil does God's work too.
(pause)
... and this here's Elias ... Baaaa!

The other knuckle is out - 'LOVE' tattooed across it. Rhah smiles his crazy smil. Chris stares fascinated at the two knuckles side by side. A moment on his face.

KING
Love, yeah!

LERNER
(makes a cuckoo sign)
Here we go again with the crazy preacher stuff. Rhah seen too many movies.

RHAH
Baaa, got no time to go to the movies. Love and Hate

too busy fighting for possession of my soul.

CHRIS
Where's Elias come from?

RHAH
(interjecting)
'Lias come naturally.

LERNER
... don't know. Done some time. Heard he worked the oil wells in Oklahoma, made some bread and washed up in El Lay.

KING
Yeah, get married to some crazy El Lay bitch, an actress or somethin', she blew all his bread - LSD, gurus, all that California shit, and then she turns him into the cops on a drug rap.

RHAH
Not the only man to meet his Jezebel either.

KING
So he got a reduced and come over here. Nam's his freedom man, Nam's his pussy. Three years he been here.

CHRIS
Three years, Jesus, he's crazy as Barnes ...

KING
Well sometimes a man jes don' wanna go back. How you gonna talk to civilians man? People back in the world just don't give a shit, y'know what I mean, to them you're a fuckin' animal is all -

LERNER
(to Chris)
I was home on leave y'know and everybody's just worried 'bout making money, everybody's out for themselves, they don't even want to talk about it man, it's like the fucking Twilight Zone back there - you wouldn't even KNOW there's a war on here. My sister says to me why you have to go there like I

started this ...

RHAH
Baaaa! Fuck it, they sold us out - so what! What'd you'all expect? Civilian life is phoney BULLSHIT man. They're ROBOTS man - watchin' dopey television and drivin' dopey cars, and they fuck up, nobody dies. That's all right, you keep fuckin' up, politicians keep lyin'. Cause it don't really matter. Don't mean shit. So what! Whatcha want - a parade! Fuck that too! No war time no grunt never got no respect. Till he was dead - and even THEN! You're fighting for YOURSELF man! You're fighting for your SOUL, dat's all. Remember dat. And it's some goddamn battle too - if you'se a man, wrestle with that angel ...
(swings his entrenching tool in a rhythmic chain-gang style)
... Love and Hate - the whole shitbang show, that's the story then and now and it ain't hardly gonna change ...

EXT. PERIMETER #2 - JUNGLE - NIGHT

The stars are out in magnificent splendor. A breeze rustling through the trees.

EXT. PERIMETER #2 - CHRIS' POSITION - NIGHT

Chris is turning in his sleep, perturbed, writhing. The whispering is more and more urgent. Death is all around. He shoots up out of his poncho liner as if shot, stunned. Scared. Looks around. All is quiet. Men sleeping.

Elias is huddled in his poncho on guard next to his foxhole. Chris joins him, sitting, wiping the sleep from his eyes.

CHRIS
... I can't sleep, why don't you get some sack time.

ELIAS
... don't feel like it either.

CHRIS
... beautiful night.

ELIAS
Yeah. I love this place at night. The stars ... there's no right or wrong in them, they're just there.

CHRIS
That's a nice way of putting it.

Elias cuffs a joint, keeping its glow hidden in the dark. A pause, both of them meditative.

CHRIS (CONT'D)
Barnes got it in for you, don't he?

ELIAS
(philosophically)
Barnes believes in what he's doing.

CHRIS
And you, do you believe?

ELIAS
In '65 - yeah. Now ...
(pause)
No. What happened today's just the beginning. We're gonna lose this war ...

CHRIS
(surprised)
You really think so ... us?

Elias' eyes seem to go to some inner place, his passion surging.

ELIAS
... we been kicking other people's asses so long I guess it's time we got our own kicked. The only decent thing I can see coming out of here are the survivors - hundreds of thousands of guys like you Taylor going back to every little town in the country knowing something about what it's like to take a life and what that can do to a person's soul - twist it like Barnes and Bunny and make 'em sick inside and if you got any brains you gonna fight it the rest of your life cause it's cheap, killing is cheap, the cheapest thing I know and when some drunk like

O'Neill starts glorifying it, you're gonna puke all over him and when the politicians start selling you a used war all over again, you and your generation gonna say go fuck yourself 'cause you know, you've seen it, and when you know it, deep down there ...

He plants his fist in Chris' gut, expelling his breath such is the force of the blow - like a power passed between them.

ELIAS (CONT'D)
... you know it till you die ... that's why the survivors remember. 'Cause the dead don't let em forget.

His eyes blazing, reliving the deaths in the village, licking the wounds for the platoon, mourning the failure of its heroism. Chris looking at him, a little awed by his intensity. Elias looks away, embarrassed that he has sermonized, looks back at the stars.

ELIAS (CONT'D)
Oh shit! Sometimes there's things in my head ... man. Grass does that to me, fucks me all up like a crazy Indian ...

CHRIS
Do you believe that stuff about ... knowing you're gonna die?

ELIAS
Yeah, those are the guys that live. I really don't think Death gives a shit, it's like a giant garbage can, I think it takes whatever it can get ... you never know where it's gonna come from anyway ... so why spin your wheels?

He shrugs, a certain bravado masking his own uncertainty.

CHRIS
... You ever think about reincarnation, all that stuff?

A lightning quick movement follows. Elias' hand passing over his face like a mime, a click of the fingers and he leans closer to Chris. A new expression on his face. Devil's eyes, mocking

child, danger in his soul, excitement, sex - the Elias that Chris saw in the smoking session in base camp. Chris smiles, sucked in, almost laughs and then the face is gone again.

ELIAS
Sure, goes on all the time. Maybe a piece of me's in you now, who knows. But when you die - really die - that's a big return ticket.
(soft)
I like to think I'm gonna come back as ... as wind or fire - or a deer
(likes the image)
... yeah, a deer ...

He smiles at the thought. Chris looks at him, looks away. A shooting star falls suddenly and dryly through the cosmos. Their eyes.

EXT. JUNGLE - STREAM - DAY (RAIN)

The Platoon moves along a shallow STREAM bordering the jungle. A thick RAIN falls amid cracks of distant thunder. Chris, Rhah, Francis, Big Harold, others are at the rear of the platoon, their ponchos pulled over them like big sad grey tents. There's a holdup ahead and the Men rest on rocks or stand. The rain makes a pointilistic pattern, the men collages of grey, their rifles slung upside down to keep dry.

Barnes is up ahead, out of the stream bank, on the radio.

EXT. JUNGLE CHURCH - DAY (RAIN)

Lerner's on point, resting in the shadow of a decaying old French Catholic Church from the 19th Century. The jungle has long ago won the battle, vines creeping into the cracks, remnants of arches layered around the church at the epicenter. Behind Lerner is Sgt.Warren and his radioman.

EXT. JUNGLE CLEARING - DAY (RAIN)

Elias, further back, is checking out the jungle alongside the clearing, noticing a number of old spider holes long since abandoned. He goes over and checks them.

EXT. JUNGLE - STREAM - DAY (RAIN)

Back at the stream, Rhah, looking old and whiskered under his poncho hood, lights up a roach, puffs it. Another crack of thunder. Chris comes over, sits with him on his rock. Rhah passes him the joint. He smokes.

Big Harold pulls a leech out of his open crotch area.

HAROLD
Shit, lookit this little fucker trying to get up ma glory hole.

FRANCIS
Hey Big Harold, put dat in your turkey loaf it won't come out your back end.

KING
(ribbing)
Yeah, big boy, thought you had that laundry gig all laid out?

BIG HAROLD
(pissed)
Shit, got to paint myself white get one of dem jobs. Get ma request in for a circumcision.

KING
Gonna be a rabbi man?

FRANCIS
Gonna cut your pecker down to size hunh Big Harold?

BIG HAROLD
Dat's okay wid me, better to have a small one den no one at all.

KING
Your girlfriends gonna look for new lovers, man. Best thing a bro's got's his flap.

HAROLD
I'll drink to your flap in Chicago, King. All I gotta do is stretch it out to 15 days and I'll be short 15 and the Beast just wouldn't dare send me back to the bush.

FRANCIS
You gonna get some for me back in the World, Harold? Whatcha gonna do?
(dreaming of it)

HAROLD
The world's gonna be ma oyster man. First's I gonna EAT - all the hamburger and french fries and steaks soaked in onions and ketchup I can get. Then I'se gonna FUCK and SUCK Sandy Bell till I sore all over and can't fuck no more, and den I'se gonna SLEEP for DAYS, for WEEKS! Den I'se gonna think bout what comes next ...

The words carry over Chris staring out at the rain, feeling a leaden fatigued high. Passes the roach, down to a millimeter, back to Rhah who points to his face.

RHAH
... you got one right there.

Chris feels for, finds the leech on the edge of his lip, cursing under his breath.

LIEUTENANT WOLFE
(in the stream, on radio)
All right move out.

The men start slogging on against the rain.

Junior is drinking from the stream, as Fu Sheng passes.

FU SHENG
Don't drink that asshole. You're gonna get malaria.

JUNIOR
Shit I hope so!

EXT. JUNGLE - CHURCH - DAY (RAIN)

On point, Lerner moves out through a remnant of an old arch, somewhat casual in his approach to point.

LERNER

Hey Sarge, you wanna tell me which way or do I get to figger it out?

Sgt.Warren, picking up a quick azimuth on his lensatic compass, points. Lerner moves in the new direction.

EXT. JUNGLE - DAY (RAIN)

Lerner moves away from the clearing, working up a slight incline when the MACHINE GUN FIRE erupts out of the jungle, spinning him - throwing him into the dirt like discarded garbage.

The men are down, yelling.

SGT. WARREN
Ambush! Incoming! Fucking incoming!

Suddenly an RPG rocket breaks out of the bush, sounding like an atom bomb as it devastates the front of the Platoon. Radio Talk is continuous now, back and forth between the three platoon radios, through the ambush.

O'NEILL
DOC, UP HERE! Lerner's hit! ...

More machine gun fire.

FRANCIS
DOC! Over here - we got ... one ... two down. Warren's hit.

EXT. JUNGLE - CHURCH - DAY (RAIN)

Chris moving up with Rhah and the others out of the stream, they hit the ground next to Sgt.O'Neill, who looks pretty scared, obviously not about to move.

CHRIS
What's going on?

O'NEILL
Shit they got RPG's on our ass. Fucking ambush - they was waiting for us to break trail!

KING
WATCH OUT! ROCKET!

Another rocket whistling in. A huge roar. Trees shredded, dirt, dust rising.

CHRIS
Who's on point?

O'NEILL
Lerner and Warren.

Chris uses his M-16 to lever himself up into a crouch and suddenly dashes forward, passing Rhah.

RHAH
Where you goin' man!

Chris tearing up. Past Flash - the hip black head with the colored beads. He's dead, torn and shredded, his face and eyes stuff with dirt. Next to him Doc is frantically tourniqueting Tubbs, shot in the legs. He's screaming.

Chris keeps moving to the front as if compelled.

EXT. JUNGLE - BARNES' POSITION - DAY (RAIN)

Barnes is laying out fire.

BARNES
Goddamit, you assholes get fucking' firepower out there!
(to Hoyt on radio)
Get Two Bravo up here. Get me a gun.
(to others)
Spread it out! More to the flanks! Look for a fuckin' target!

Another explosion.

EXT. JUNGLE - FORWARD POINT - DAY (RAIN)

Chris comes alongside Francis near the point, throws himself down. Banging his head against his helmet as he falls. The incoming rounds are tearing up the front of the platoon.

CHRIS

(to Francis)
Where's Lerner?

FRANCIS
(terrified)
Out there man - behind the log.

Looking. A body - moaning, sort of moving, wriggling, as if trying to escape the pain.

CHRIS
Oh Jesus!

His eyes moving to Sgt.Warren lying alongside a tree - calmly trying to stack his intestines back into his ruptured stomach. Another RPG comes in.

Chris makes a conscious decision, moves up - bit by bit, shielding himself with tree stumps, ant hills, laying out fire, trying to get closer to Lerner.

Francis following his progress, bug-eyed.

Fu Sheng now comes up with his M-60 - Harold his loader, belts of ammo flapping against their bodies. He fires from the hip, providing cover fire for Chris, then pops down.

EXT. FORWARD POINT - JUNGLE - DAY (DRIZZLING RAIN)

Chris, firing out another magazine, crawls closer to Lerner, trying to ascertain if he's still alive.

CHRIS
Lerner! Lerner, can you hear me man?

Lerner groans. A fresh burst of AK fire rakes the area. Lerner jerks spasmodically with the impact of the rounds.

Chris spots the sniper. In a hole in the ground. Twenty-five meters off. Snapping the magazine out of his AK to reload. A live gook.

Chris tears off a volley at him but the gook disappears in the hole. This is the moement, Chris realizes it, it's now or never if Chris intends to get the gook. He's got to make a move before

the man has reloaded his weapon.

He pulls his grenade, pops the pin. He lets the spoon fly off, activating the grenade-timer, as he humps to his feet and runs for the gook hole, concentrating, concentrating. That head is going to pop up any second with a freshly-loaded weapon and tear his head off.

Chris won't make it back to the hole. The throw has to be perfect. He won't get another chance. He heaves the frag, drops and rolls away. The throw is perfect, the golden arc of flight from the outfield nailing the baserunner. It twists cleanly in the hole. The explosion muffled but deadly.

Chris scrambles to his feet, a look of almost total surprise on his face. He can't seem to believe he did it. Pointing his M-16 before him, he advances on the hole, looking over the muzzle to see the badly-mangled NVA man twisted at the bottom.

Chris hurries over to Lerner. He's in bad shape, hit in several places, vaguely conscious.

CHRIS (CONT'D)
Gator! Gator!
(Lerner groans)
I'm gonna get you out man. You're gonna be okay Gator ... okay?

Fu Sheng laying out fire to protect them, Harold splitting off to get more ammo.

Chris getting Lerner to his feet, hauling him back with all his strength, past Francis ...

EXT. JUNGLE - WOLFE'S POSITION - DAY (RAIN)

Lt.Wolfe seems disorientated, struggling with the rain water washing off his map, trying to read the coordinates for an arty fire mission.

WOLFE
(into the radio)
Redleg, Redleg ... Ripper Bravo Two Actual. Fire mission. Grid six-four-niner ... four-zero-two. Direction six-one-zero-zero. Dinks dug in bunkers.

Danger close. Adjust fire, over ...

RADIO VOICE
Rog, Two Bravo. Solid copy, stand by for shot, out.

ACE
Sir, Bravo Three is inbound from the Sierra Whiskey. Should be here in two zero mikes if'n they don' hit any shit.

WOLFE
Fuckin' A!

Elias runs up to him. Fire all around, incoming and outgoing, makes them yell to each other.

ELIAS
Lootenant, they're kickin our ass, they know we're gonna bring heavy shit on 'em pretty soon so they're gonna get in tight under the arty. I spotted a cut running around to the left. Lemme take some men and roll up that flank ..
(pointing)
I can work right up on 'em ...

Wolfe unsure, looks up for the artillery.

WOLFE
(to Ace)
Get me Barnes ... I don't know 'Lias, we got four down up there, if I split you off, we ...

Elias grabs a stick, urgent, starts drawing their position in the dirt for Wolfe.

ELIAS
Look, Lootenant ...

Wolfe looks up, relieved as Barnes splashes into the CP group. Thunder peals.

BARNES
(yelling at Wolfe and Ace)
Where the fuck is red platoon! Tell 'em to get their asses up here! What the fuck you doin' back here

Elias? Round up your assholes and move 'em up front, we're getting chopped to shit.

ELIAS
(yelling back)
Barnes, listen to me ... there's 5-6 spiderholes back there
(points)
next to the church.
(draws it into the ground as he talks)
Third Platoon's coming up the stream to reinforce us. Flank's wide open, dinks get 3-4 snipers in these holes, when Third Platoon comes up, they'll get us in a crossfire with 'em. We'll shoot each other to shit, then they'll hit us with everything they got. It'll be a massacre!

Barnes looking at the drawing.

WOLFE
Sounds pretty far out to me 'Lias.

ELIAS
Maybe but I seen it happen at Ia Drang in '66, First Cavalry and they cut us to fuckin' pieces!
(back to Barnes)
Give me three men, if I'm wrong, I can still roll up that flank.

BARNES
(a look)
Take off, but keep your radio here.

Elias goes, stops, looks at Barnes ...

ELIAS
... You keep pouring out that suppressing fire, Barnes. I don't wanna be caught out there with my ass hanging out you hear me?

BARNES
Don't tell me how to fight this fucking war, 'Lias, you go crying to fucking brigade on your time. Out here you belong to me. Now move.

A look. Elias goes fast. More thunder peals. As the 155mm howitzers - sounding like deep tom-toms some three miles distant - beat out their shells. An ominous sound. Closer.

ACE
Sir! Shot out. Arty's on the way!

BARNES
(hurrying back to the front)
Get that asshole O'Neill up here willya!

EXT. JUNGLE - FU SHENG'S POSITION - DAY

Fu Sheng is laying out fire when he senses something, looks up. The artillery shell sounds too close. Getting bigger and bigger on the horizon. Too big, too loud. A groan of fear on his face, then knowledge. Then ... a huge EXPLOSION engulfs him.

EXT. JUNGLE - HAROLD'S POSITION - DAY (RAIN)

BIG HAROLD
Short round! It's short, man! They fuckin' got Fu Sheng! BARNES! OVER HERE!

EXT. JUNGLE - DAY (RAIN)

Barnes hearing it, starts forward. Another huge shell starting to whistle in on them.

BARNES
That fuckin' idiot!

It explodes. This is about three times the intensity of the RPG. The jungle floor shakes, trees splinter. Barnes is knocked to his knees, rimaces in pain. Hoyt, Barnes' radio operator, screams out as a fist-sized chunk of hot shrapnel sticks in his back. He's screeching, frantically trying to shuck the radio from his back, his fatigue shirt smoking.

Barnes jerks the radio off Hoyt's back, knocks the man to his knees and unsheathes his bayonet. Ripping off the back of his shirt, Barnes sets to digging out the shrapnel.

EXT. MOREHOUSE'S POSITION - DAY (RAIN)

Morehouse is decimated by a third explosion, chunks of shrapnel whirring like battleaxes into the tree trunks.

EXT. JUNGLE - HAROLD'S POSITION - DAY (RAIN)

Big Harold is tearing blindly away from the front, helmet gone, rifle dragging in the mud when he stumbles, sprawling face down. He jumps up, looks back, sees now the wire over which he tripped. It takes a second to register. He shares a look with Bunny who's already on the ground.

BUNNY
Satchel charge! GET DOWN!

Harold goes for the ground the same instant the satchel explodes.

EXT. JUNGLE - CHURCH - DAY (RAIN)

Chris, further back, dumps Lerner with Doc who's got more than he can handle.

CHRIS
Take care of him Doc! Please!

Doc looking at him, a dark look of hopelessness. Lerner is a mess, groaning, reaching for Chris' hand.

LERNER
... don't ... don't leave me man ...

A look between them. Rhah instersecting.

RHAH
Taylor - get your ass over here. Move!

CHRIS
Hang tough, Gator. Hang in there, man, you're gonna be OK ... just hang on.

Feeling like a liar, peeling the man's hands off him, leaving him there looking numb. Chris is shaken, Lerner's blood all over him.

He tears out after Rhah, linking up with Elias and Crawford. Elias motioning them to hurry. Another huge artillery round exploding out to the front.

EXT. JUNGLE - O'NEILL'S POSITION - DAY (RAIN)

Sgt.O'Neill, scared out of his mind, hugging the earth, tries to crawl into a small cut in the ground but finds it occupied by a cringing Junior.

EXT. JUNGLE - WOLFE'S POSITION - DAY (RAIN)

Barnes rushes up out of the forest like Achilles, towering in his rage, at Lieutenant Wolfe, ripping his handset from him as the Lieutenant reads off the coordinates off his map.

BARNES
YOU IGNORANT ASSHOLE! - What the fuck coordinates you giving! You killed a bunch of people with that fucked up fire mission! You know that? ... ah shit!

Wolfe stares at him, open-mouthed. Disgusted, Barnes hunkers down to read the coordinates from his own map into the handset.

BARNES (CONT'D)
Redleg Romeo .. Ripper Bravo Two. Check your fire, check fire, you're short on our pos! I say again, check your fuckin' fire! ... From Registration point, add one five zero, left five zero, fire for effect!

New incoming fire drowns out Barnes.

EXT. JUNGLE - ELIAS' POSITION - DAY

Elias - a defiant look on his face - moves fast but cautiously back across the Church landmarks. Chris following then Rhah and Crawford. The RAIN has now settled into a mist hugging the ground.

ELIAS
Move it! Move it!

Elias comes to a stop, looks. Behind them we hear the sounds of battle, gauging their distance from the main body.

The spider holes are still empty. But he listens, senses something out there getting closer.

ELIAS (CONT'D)
They're coming ...

Chris looking at Rhah. How does he know?

Elias points out an imaginary line across the breaking mist.

ELIAS (CONT'D)
Stagger yourselves across this line, shoot anything that moves. They'll be coming from here.

RHAH
(team leader)
Gotcha.

ELIAS
One of them gets through it's curtains.

RHAH
Where you going?

ELIAS
Down along the river 'bout 100 metres, 'case they try to flank us there. Third Platoon's coming up on our rear so watch for 'em.

CHRIS
I'll go with you.

ELIAS
No ... I move faster alone.
(a grin)

Elias, his pack stripped, is gone, like a fleet leaf, vanishing into the Jungle.

RHAH
(stringing them out)
Okay Crawford - over here. Taylor - down twenty yards behind that tree.

EXT. JUNGLE - WOLFE'S POSITION - DAY (MIST)

Barnes has finished correcting the fire mission, hurls the handset back at Wolfe, a wild look in his eyes, studying the

incoming fire. Makes a decision.

BARNES
Let's move back, link up with Three. Let the arty do a little work.
(to Ace on radio, ignoring Wolfe)
Push Two Alpha and Two Charlie. Tell'em to haul ass and re-group at the church. Tell'em NOT to fire.
(Ace transmits)

WOLFE
What about Elias? We pull back they'll be cut off. He needs cover fire.

BARNES
(looks at him like he's stupid)
I'll get him.
(with a threatening undertone)
You just haul ass too lootenant.
(going, to Ace)
... don't send Bravo Three up till I get back to the CP. Now move out, all of you.

As he snaps his weapon onto full auto and runs off after Elias in a crouch ... a man with a mission.

EXT. JUNGLE - RHAH AND CHRIS' POSITION - DAY

Next to the Church deployed in the jungle, Rhah looks on, silent.

Chris in his position, waits. It is so silent in comparison to the racket from the battle across the forest. The Mist clings to the trees, moist and lovely. Then, a flicker of movement, sound.

Chris hears it, tightens. His POV - at fifty yards. An evanescence of beige and green uniforms moving towards him very fast, scurrying. They look like headless ghosts.

Chris opens fire.

CHRIS
GET EM!!!!!

Rhah and Crawford open up. A rachet of sound, one of the fiures seems to go down, then another but at this distance through

jungle it is difficult to say. The firing just as suddenly breaks off and the silence returns.

CHRIS (CONT'D)
(ecstatic)
Yeah! I got two of them fuckers ...

RHAH
I got one ...

CHRIS
... See them go down? Like fuckin' target practice man, fuck you Charlie!! Ho Chi Minh sucks dead dick! ... Crawford!
(sees him, stunned)

Crawford, the blond-locked California beach boy, lies on the earth, hit in a lung, having difficulty breathing, moaning in a soft undercurrent. Chris runs up on him.

CHRIS (CONT'D)
Oh man! ... man!

Attending him. Rhah runs up.

RHAH
Looks like a lung babe. But you're gonna be all right, you only need one of them fuckers.

CRAWFORD
Oh shit man I never thought I'd get hit, I was ...
(gagging)

RHAH
Stay cool. We gonna carry you out.

Barnes appears, running towards them, looking down at Crawford, at Rhah.

RHAH (CONT'D)
Sarge, 'bout five gooks tried to ...

BARNES
Where's Elias?

RHAH
... came through right over there. We got three of them, we ...

BARNES
Didn't you hear the arty shift? We're pulling back. Get your wounded man and get the fuck back to the church. Get going.

CHRIS
(indicating jungle)
... but 'Lias is still out there.

BARNES
I'll get him. You get the man in, Taylor
(indicating Crawford)
NOW. Or I'll Article 15 both your asses. Move!

Chris and Rhah look at Barnes sullenly, then reluctantly start moving Crawford onto a poncho liner they use as a litter.

BARNES (CONT'D)
Move it, MOVE IT!

He's in his blackest rage, the force of his words almost physically pushing the men to move out with Crawford. Barnes turns now to deal with Elias.

EXT. ELIAS' JUNGLE - DAY

Elsewhere, Elias stands silently, listens to the forest. In the distance the firefight can hardly be heard. His helmet gone, his hair hanging free, he is at his best now - alone. He hears it. Somebody running through the jungle, about 100 yards, boots on leaves, coming towards him.

He begins to move lateral to the sound. His steps unheard, better at this than the enemy.

THREE ENEMY FIGURES now appear, crouched and moving very fast with light equipment through the mist.

Elias swerves up in immediate foreground, his back to us, FIRING. All three Figures fall.

A quick glimpse of Elias, not bothering to stop, moving to his next position.

EXT. BARNES' JUNGLE - DAY

Barnes, moving through the jungle, reacts to the fire, resetting his course. Like a hunter stalking a deer. Suddenly there's more firing. Then silence -

EXT. ELIAS' JUNGLE - DAY

TWO MORE ENEMY lie dead in the jungle. A rustle of movement, then a CRY - chilling, jubilant, a war cry.

A pair of feet moving lightly over the jungle. A glimpse of Elias. In his full glory. Roaming the jungle, born to it.

EXT. BARNES' JUNGLE - DAY

Barnes fixing on him, moving.

EXT. ELIAS' JUNGLE - DAY

An NVA SOLDIER, jungle-whiskered, dirty, smart, crouches, listens, looks to his PARTNER. What are they fighting here? The First One mutter something sharp and they split fast in the direction they've come.

They get about six steps when Elias suddenly rises up from the bush, not ten yards in front of them, his shots ripping into them, driving the surprised life from them. Elias is gone.

EXT. NVA JUNGLE - DAY

Elsewhere, another three NVA stop, turn and flee back from where they came.

EXT. JUNGLE CHURCH - DAY

Chris and Rhah get Crawford back to the church grounds, lay him down. No activity around them. Chris plunges back into the jungle where they left Barnes.

RHAH

Taylor!

EXT. ELIAS AND BARNES' JUNGLE - DAY

Barnes moving, stops, listens. Something is running towards him. But it's hidden by the bush. He brings his rifle up smooth and quick, waits, then as the bush parts, Elias is standing there. Looking at Barnes.

Barnes sees him, starts to lower his rifle, but then stops. He raises it back an inch, sights it. Pause. A cold searing look of hatred coming over his face.

In that moment, Elias understands. Quick as a deer, he makes his move, trying to plunge back into the bush.

Barnes fires. Once, twice, three times - the blast rocking the jungle.

Elias jerking backwards into the bush, mortally wounded. Bird cries. A crime against nature.

Barnes calmly lowers his rifle, and walks away from it.

EXT. CHRIS' JUNGLE - DAY

Chris, cutting through the jungle, hears the shots. He stops, listens. Someone is moving through bush towards him, leaves and foliage shaking.

Chris tightens, raises his rifle.

Barnes steps through into his sight - sees him.

Chris lowers his rifle. Barnes walking past him as if he weren't even there.

BARNES
Elias is dead. Join up with the platoon. Move it.

CHRIS
(shocked)
He's dead! Where? ... You saw him?

BARNES
Yeah. Back about 100 metres. He's dead, now get going, the gooks are all over the fuckin' place.

Moving on quickly. Chris has no choice but to follow, looking back one more time.

EXT. CHURCH GROUNDS - JUNGLE - DAY

TWO CHOPPERS are coming into a LZ in front of the Church. The two platoons, Second and Third, reinforcing, are being evacuated as quickly as possible, one load (6-8 men, depending on the wounded) after other. The choppers are spraying dust all over the place. A scene of chaos, radio talk layering it. Doc is out of supplies, making do with improvised bandages, etc.

WOLFE
MOVE IT MOVE IT MOVE IT.

Lerner goes by, horribly wounded on a makeshift litter, into the chopper, Doc attending, holding the IV.

Chris catching a glimpse of him, waiting to get on the chopper, turning to look as:

Hoyt and Sgt.Warren, both wounded, are hurried aboard on litters. The chopper lifting off.

Chris and others now running to the corpses of Flash, Morehouse, and Fu Sheng lying under dirty ponchos, their boots sticking out. The ponchos are blown away in a burst of wind off the chopper blades, revealing their faces - dirt stuffing their eyes and mouths, waxen figures.

Chris and the others lifting them and carrying them towards the next chopper now coming in.

They throw the bodies on. Tubbs and Crawford, both wounded, now move past Chris, into the chopper. Chris running back, with King carrying a litter - their eyes falling on:

Barnes talking with Wolfe and Ace, making signals under the roaring sounds of the chopper. Shaking his head. No. No Elias.

Chris and King looking at each other, mute. They numbly start loading Big Harold, minus his leg, onto the stretcher.

The Third Chopper is down now, waiting, roaring blades silhouetting off the face of the cathedral. A ROCKET BLAST

suddenly goes off not too far from the chopper, incoming fire. The DOOR GUNNER signaling for them to hurry, laying out fire.

INT/EXT. CHOPPER - JUNGLE - DAY

Chris and King hustling Big Harold's 250 pounds into the chopper. Climbing in with him. Wolfe, Barnes, Ace running in with them. The perimeter is bare.

Chris' eyes flitting over Barnes as he jumps in. The chopper lifting off as another explosion rocks the area. The Door Gunner sees something, opens up.

Big Harold, cursing, looks chalky but hog happy as he manages a glance down at the jungle. His right leg is gone. Tears are rolling out of his eyes.

KING
Man, you gonna be in Japan this time tomorrow, Big Harold.

BIG HAROLD
Yeah, I'se lucky dis time, what's a leg to get the fuck outta here ...
(at the NVA)
Eat ma shit, you motherfuckers!

He sinks back, sick. Chris' eyes sudenly fix on something. He can't believe it. He shoves King, points. King sees it. Both stunned.

Barnes is looking. So's Lt.Wolfe, so's Ace. So's the Door Gunner.

Elias is coming out of the jungle. Staggering, blood disfiguring his face and chest, hanging on with all his dimming strength, looking up at them - trying to reach them.

Chris shakes Wolfe, his words drowned out by the roar.

The Chopper Captain looking down, dips. His co-pilot pointing.

The NVA are coming out of the jungle, closing on the spot where Elias is.

Incoming rounds are hitting the chopper. The Door Gunner maniacally firing.

Barnes looking down at the man, can't believe it.

Elias is on his last legs now, obviously being hit by the incoming fire of the NVA. He falls to his knees, still stretching upwards for life.

The Chopper Captain shakes his head at Wolfe.

The Chopper dips one more time firing at the NVA, low and fierce over the jungle.

Chris looking back in horror.

Elias crucified. The NVA coming out now by the dozens from the treeline.

Elias crumbling to the ground. Obviously dead or dying.

HELICAPTAIN ON RADIO
... we still got one on the deck. Bring the gunships in.

Barnes drawing in.

Chris looking at him in revulsion. He knows. Barnes sees his look, ignores it, all of them sitting there silent, living with that final horrifying image of Elias.

EXT. UNDERGROUND HUTCH - BASE CAMP - NIGHT

The 'heads' are assembled - what's left of them. Rhah, King, Francis, Doc, Adam, a quiet black kid, and Chris, who is impassioned tonight.

CHRIS
He killed him. I know he did. I saw his eyes when he came back in ...

RADIO VOICE
(puffing on his bowl)
How do you know the dinks didn't get him. You got no proof man.

CHRIS
Proof's in the eyes. When you know you know. You were there Rhah - I know what you were thinking. I say we frag the fucker. Tonight.

He looks to King who puffs on a joint, his eyes red.

KING
I go with dat, an eye for an eye man.

DOC
Right on, nothing wrong with Barnes another shot in the head wouldn't cure.

RHAH
(to Chris)
Shit boy you been out in the sun too long. You try that, he'll stick it right back up your ass with a candle on it.

CHRIS
Then what do you suggest big shot?

RHAH
(to Chris)
I suggest you watch your own asses cause Barnes gonna be down on ALL OF 'EM.

FRANCIS
How you figger that?

RHAH
Shit man - Human nature.

Flashes the old knuckle - 'HATE'.

KING
Then you jes gonna forget 'bout Elias and all the good times we done had? Right in here.

RHAH
He dugged his own grave.

DOC
(correcting)

He dug it.

RHAH
He DUGGED it too.

CHRIS
Fuck this shit!

RHAH
You guys trying to cure the headache by cutting off the head. 'Lias didn't ask you to fight his battles and if there's a Heaven - and god, I hope so - I know he's sitting up there drunk as a fuckin' monkey and smokin' shit cause HIS PAINS HE DONE LEFT DOWN HERE. Baaaaaaaaa!
(a vehement movement of his head)

CHRIS
You're wrong man! Any way you cut it Rhah, Barnes is a murderer.

KING
Right on.

RHAH
I remember first time you came in here Taylor you telling me how much you admired that bastard.

CHRIS
I was wrong.

RHAH
(snorts)
Wrong? You ain't EVER been right - 'bout nothing. And dig this you assholes and dig it good! Barnes been shot 7 times and he ain't dead, that tell you something? Barnes ain't meant to die. Only thing can get Barnes ... is Barnes!

Barnes stands there, silhouetted in the trap door, looking down at the men who are stunned to see him here.

He steps down into the hutch, his face now lit by candle light. A bottle of whiskey in his hand, drunk, ugly, sweating, but as always, with dignity, possessive of his silence. He feels their

fear in the silence, enjoys it.

BARNES
(soft)
Talking 'bout killing?

He totters slightly as he circles the outer edge of the hutch. No one talks.

BARNES (CONT'D)
Y'all experts? Y'all know about killing?

He takes the bowl from Adams, smokes it.

BARNES (CONT'D)
You pussies gotta smoke this shit so's you can hide from reality? ...
(smokes again)
Me I don't need that shit. I AM reality.

Confronting Chris, he moves on, taunting them all.

BARNES (CONT'D)
There's the way it oughta be and there's the way it is. 'Lias he was full of shit, 'Lias was a crusader - I got no fight with a man does what he's told but when he don't, the machine breaks down, and when the machine breaks down, WE break down ... and I ain't gonna allow that. From none of you. Not one ...

Walks past Rhah, past King, throws the pot bowl into the dirt of the floor.

BARNES (CONT'D)
Y'all loved Elias, want to kick ass, I'se here - all by my lonesome, nobody gonna know. Five you boys 'gainst me?
(pause, very soft)
Kill me.

Almost an appeal - naked, intense. Rhah, Francis, Doc look away.

King, the biggest one there, is about to say something, but the moment passes.

Chris waits, his anger on the rise.

Barnes takes a swigger from the whiskey, then turns away contemptuously.

BARNES (CONT'D)
I SHIT on all o' you.

CHRIS
KILL YOU MOTHERFUCKER!!!

Chris slams into Barnes, rushing him off his feet. Pounding his face, solid blows.

KING AND OTHERS
Get that mother, babe, go ... Kick his ass, kill that cocksucker!!!

But Barnes is too quick and very strong and takes the blows, getting outside Chris' arm, twisting and flipping him in a wrestler's grip - throwing him hard onto his back on the dirt floor.

The expression of the Men watching slumps, their hopes dashed.

Barnes springs around on Chris, straddles him, one hand pushing his face back, hits him hard. Once. Twice.

Chris grimaces, groans, helpless now. A flick of sound.

A knife whipped out of Barnes' boot and pressing against Chris' throat. Chris bleeding from the nose and mouth.

Rhah suddenly spinning into action, fast now, realizing what Barnes intends to do.

RHAH
EASY BARNES, EASY MAN!!!

Barnes is on the verge - about to kill again.

Chris waiting.

Rhah coaxing him, moving closer.

RHAH (CONT'D)

You'll do dinky dau in Long Binh Barnes. Ten years - kill an enlisted. Ten years, Barnes, just climb the walls. DON'T DO IT ...

Barnes' eyes tremble in the candle light, his scars ugly, a spasm clenching and locking his facial muscles. Then suddenly he is calm again, very calm. We sense a man of enormous self-control.

Suddenly he flicks his knife across Chris, leaving a mark below his left eye.

Chris gasps. Looking up at Barnes rising off him. The boots alongside his face.

The Men looking on, the tension lowering.

BARNES
(contemptuous)
Death? What do you guys know about it?

He walks out. Quietly.

EXT. AIR SHOTS - JUNGLE, CHURCH - DAY

Chris sits at the very edge of a Huey Chopper, bandana around his forehead, long hair blowing in the wind, Barnes' mark below his eyes, slicked out now like a jungle veteran, looking down at the VILLAGE where the massacre occurred.

The Village is still a smoking ruin, a few peasants and water buffalo straggling like ants to reconstruct.

Bunny, next to Chris, pops his gum, indifferent. Barnes, next to him, shifts, reads a map.

Rodriguez is praying, his mouth moving without audible words, getting ready for the drop.

King is making last minute adjustments in his pack.

Bunny now nudges Chris, points. The Church in the Jungle where Elias was killed is visible. An outline of the Cemetery. Uncomfortable memories play over Chris' face.

CHRIS (V.O.)
They sent us back into the valley the next day -

about 2,000 metres from Cambodia - into a battalion perimeter. Alpha Company had been hit hard the day before by a sizeable force and Charlie Company had been probed that night. There were other battalions in the valley, we weren't the only ones but we knew we were going to be the bait to lure them out. And somewhere out there was the entire 141st NVA Regiment.

The BATTALION PERIMETER now breaks in the clear ahead. Smoke grenades of various colors are being popped on the cleared LZ. It's not big, its radius 200 yards, heavily sandbagged, deeply dug, rolls of barbed wire protecting it, radio antennas sprouting from the CP - and surrounded on all four sides by jungle.

The First Chopper rocking down, whipping up dust clouds. Chris jumps out, moving out fast as the Second Chopper starts in.

EXT. BATTALION CP - PERIMETER #3 - DUSK

At the Battalion CP, the Major confers with Captain Harris and two other Captains. Two NVA PRISONERS are sitting on their knees, interrogated by Vietnamese Kit Carson scouts and a U.S. Sergeant, their hands tied.

The Scout slaps the shit out of the NVA.

EXT. PLATOON CP - PERIMETER #3 - DUSK

All this is watched from a distance by Ace and Doc and Lt.Wolfe at the Platoon CP. Ace and Doc are digging the foxhole, the ace of spades in Ace's helmet band, sharing the information with Tony and Francis.

ACE
... they caught 'em last night pulling some shit on Charlie Company. They found maps on 'em, man - got a friend at Battalion says they had every fuckin' foxhole here fixed on it. Distances, treelines, our claymores, trip wires, everything? I shit you not.

DOC
Shit, so what the fuck are we doing here? Why don't we move ...
(no answer)

Bad vibes, man, I got bad vibes here. Where are the new guys they provided us anyway.

TONY
I heard we's in Cambodia right fuckin' NOW.

FRANCIS
You kidding man ...

Rhah comes up, a walking stick in hand, huge pirate kerchief on his head, semi-naked.

RHAH
You wanted to see me sir?

WOLFE
Jackson, looks like you got Elias' squad now.

RHAH
Squad? I didn't know we was still referring to this platoon in terms of squads sir.
(with a snicker for Ace and Doc)

WOLFE
(indicating a rough drawing in the dirt)
These two holes are yours ...

RHAH
Begging your pardon Lieutenant but my holes are far enuff apart you could run a regiment through there and nobody'd see them - I got five live bodies left ...

WOLFE
I don't want to hear your problems, Jackson. You'll get new men any day. Time being you make do like everybody else.

RHAH
Hey Lieutenant I didn't ask for this job, I ...

WOLFE
(leaves)
I don't want to hear about it Jackson.

RHAH
(amazed, looking off at him)
You don't want to hear about it?

WOLFE
(turns)
That's right. I don't want to hear about it 'cause to tell you the truth, I don't give a shit okay ... I just don't give a shit anymore.

RHAH
(shrugs, to himself)
Right ...

WOLFE
(passing Ace digging the CP hole)
This is one time we could sure use Elias.

ACE
(to Doc)
'Some people say I'm wishy washy. Maybe I am. Maybe I ain't.'

EXT. PERIMETER #3 - CHRIS' FOXHOLE - DUSK

On the edge of the perimeter, King puts out his claymore, unraveling it back towards his FOXHOLE, intersecting MEN form the Third Platoon, who file out on a night ambush, skirting the trip wires, demoralized, silent. Eye exchanges, but no words.

Chris sits on the foxhole watching the ambush go out, smoking a joint by himself, depressed. King comes in with the claymore wires, attaching them to their detonators. Their foxhole - as are all of the Platoon's - is positioned just inside the treeline bordering the LZ, so that they are quite isolated from the center of the perimeter where they first landed.

KING
Glad I ain't going with 'em. Somewhere out dere man is de Beast and he hungry tonight ... Man, what a bummer. Ten days and a wakeup and I'm still dealing wid this shit - fuckin' etcetera and ad infinitum man ...

The LAST SOLDIER in the file recedes into the foliage.

KING (CONT'D)
(noticiing Chris' silence)
What's the matter wid you? ... How come you ain't writing no more? You was always writing something home. Looks like youse half a bubble off, Taylor.

He doesn't answer, makes a futile gesture.

KING (CONT'D)
What about your folks? That grandma you was telling me about? ...

Chris shakes his head.

KING (CONT'D)
Girl?

Chris' eyes answer negatively.

KING (CONT'D)
Must be somebody?

CHRIS
... there's nobody.

KING
(shifts, uncomfortable)
You been smoking too much shit babe. Gotta control that. Takes a man down ... I remember when you first come out to the bush, you was straight as a ...

CHRIS
Who gives a shit!

He shifts, annoyed, prepares his grenades along the sand bags. King shrugs, preparing his meal, sings himself a snatch of song, a good natured man.

KING
(soft)
'People say I'm the life of the party cause I tell a joke or two although I may be laughing loud and hardy deep inside I'm blue ...'

CHRIS
Y'ever get caught in a mistake King and you just can't get out of it?

KING
Way out of anything, man. Just keep your pecker up, your powder dry, the worm WILL turn. How many days you short?

CHRIS
Not just me ... it's the way the whole thing works. People like Elias get wasted and people like Barnes just go on making up rules any way they want and what do we do, we just sit around in the middle and suck on it! We just don't add up to dry shit.

KING
Does a chicken have lips? Whoever said we did, babe. Make it outta here, it's all gravy, every day of the rest of your life man - gravy. Oh shit, superlifer!

O'Neill comes up, jerks his thumb at King.

O'NEILL
Get your gear together, King, your orders just come through.

KING
(speechless)
You jokin' me man? ... shit, you ain't kidding! Cocksucker. Oh wowww ... the lifers made a mistake, they cuttin' me some slack, they cutting me some slack Taylor!
(dances)

O'NEILL
Collect your shit and move out King. You got 10 minutes make the last chopper. Cee ess em oh or your ass is mine.
(to Taylor)
Francis is coming over.
(hurries off)

King packing up, double time. Chris comes over, helps him, trying to share his happiness but not succeeding.

CHRIS
Hey that's great King, that's great ... you take it on home for me, you tell 'em King ... got your address right? You know where you can reach men, man. Anytime!

KING
I gotta didi man. Don't wanna miss that chopper. I'll send you a postcard. After I get me some. I'll send you some tapes too man. This new guy Jimi Hendrix man, whew ... you okay Taylor? Just 'member take it easy now, don't think too much, don't be a fool, no such thing as a coward cause it don't mean nuthin. Jes keep on keepin' on. Okay my man ...

Chris, fighting his depression, slaps hands with King. A brief moment, they look at each other. A friendship that was forever and is now over. They both sort of know they'll never see each other again.

CHRIS
I'll walk you out ...

Francis coming up, hauling his pack.

EXT.PERIMETER #3 - JUNIOR'S FOXHOLE - DUSK

On another foxhole, Rodriguez positions his M-60, brings up his ammo belts (no loaders left). Tony eating, nervous, watches him, shakes his head.

TONY
Rumor goin' round is they got tanks. Soviet shit, T-34's ...
(pause)
Hey Rodriguez, don't you ever say nothing?

RODRIGUEZ
(a thick Mexican accent)
What do you want me to say, it's all the same ol' shit.

Tony shrugs, back to his food.

EXT. PERIMETER #3 - JUNIOR'S FOXHOLE - DUSK

On another foxhole, Barnes in full pack checks the soles of Junior's bare feet. Bunny and O'Neill looking on. Junior is moaning as if he's dying, overdoing it by a mile.

BARNES
So what's the problem?

O'NEILL
Says he can't walk.

BARNES
Shit. Get your boots on Martin, next time I catch you putting mosquito repellant on your fuckin' feet I'm gonna courtmartial your nigger ass.

JUNIOR
(cracks)
DEN COURTMARTIAL ME MOTHERFUCKAH, bust my ass, send me to fucking Long Binh, do your worst but I ain't walking no more. De white man done got his last klik outta me. Get some chuck dude to hump this shit.

BARNES
(suddenly soft)
Get me that centipede, O'Neill.

O'Neill is puzzled. What centipede?

O'NEILL
Sarge?

BARNES
Yeah that long hairy orange and black bastard I found in the ammo crate. I'm gonna put it in this asshole's crotch, see if he can walk.

Junior's eyes bulge with suspiscion and sudden terror, his demeanor totally alert now.

O'NEILL
(understanding)
Oh yeah, right away Sarge.

JUNIOR
No! Wait! I'll walk, fuck you I'll walk, I don't need this shit! I don't need this shit!

BUNNY
Fucking pussy, fuck it Sarge, I gotta have him on my hole?

Barnes going. O'Neill catching up with him.

O'NEILL
Uh ... Bob. Like to speak to you. Take a minute.

BARNES
(stops)
Yeah, what is it?

O'NEILL
(shuffles, reluctant)
Bob, I got Elias' R&R ... It's coming up in 3 days. Going to Hawaii. See Patsy.
(pause, no reaction from Barnes)
I never asked you for a break, I was hoping you ... you'd send me in on the chopper with King ... what do you say Chief?
(a friendly punch)

BARNES
I can't do that for you, Red ... We need every swinging dick in the field. Sorry bout that ...
(starts to go)

O'NEILL
(pleads)
Hey Bob, come on! Talk to me hunh, it's your friend Red, I'm only asking you for three days chief ...

BARNES
I'm talking to you Red and I'm telling you no. Get back to your position.

O'NEILL
(grabs him, desperate)
Bob, I gotta bad feeling about this, I ... I'm telling you I got a bad feeling, man, I don't think

I'm gonna make it .. y'know what I mean?

BARNES
(quietly)
... everybody gotta die sometime Red ... Get back to your foxhole.

A look in his eyes. Very remote, very cold, silencing O'Neill. Barnes walks off.

EXT. PERIMETER #3 - BATTALION LZ - DUSK

At the LZ, King runs out, gets on the last SUPPLY CHOPPER with some other men. It lifts off, swirling dust, the last rays of daylight.

Chris watches from a Battalion CP area, waves back - the chopper sound receding in the horizon, the comparative silence of the jungle now creeping up on the perimeter. He turns and starts back to his foxhole.

A man is watching him. He's sitting on a sandbag, face in shadow. It startles Chris, something about him. Something different. A deep West Virginia drawl.

SMOKING MAN
Got a light?

CHRIS
Uh sure ...

Goes over reluctantly, flicks his lighter, cupping it from the wind. The flame catches a sudden, uneasy expression in Chris' face as he sees the Smoking Man.

We come around and see what Chris sees in the light of the flame. A face that smiles at him like a death's head, a large ugly blister on his mouth, whiskered, pale - but smiling. A sick man wouldn't smile like this, but he is smiling too intimately, as if he knows Chris from way back. But he doesn't. Or does he? Perhaps it was the man Chris first saw at the airstrip when he came in-country. The same expression of evil, of a man who has seen too much and died, but still lives.

Chris feels an unnatural fear passing through him.

The Man stands, sucking on his cigarette, stretches. He is thin and very tall, towering over Chris.

SMOKING MAN
... later.

He goes. Chris watches him, wondering. The man never looks back, a leisurely, confident stroll. In that moment, there is an EXPLOSION from way out in the jungle, about a quarter of a mile. Then another, then small arms fire. Chris looks, knows.

EXT. PERIMETER #3 - RHAH'S FOXHOLE - DUSK

On his foxhole, Junior listening to the distant firing. Bunny is introspective - talking to Junior as if he were his best friend, although they have nothing in common.

BUNNY
... y'know some of the things we done, I don't feel like we done something wrong but sometimes y'know I get this bad feeling. Not all that shit the Chaplain's jamming up our ass 'bout the Good Lord ... just a fucking bad feeling, y'know what I mean? Don't know why. I told the Chaplain the truth is I really like it here. You do what you want, nobody fucks with you. Only worry you got's dying and if dat happens you won't know about it anyway. So what the fuck ...
(chuckles)

Junior looks at him like he's really crazy. Back to the distant firing.

JUNIOR
(pissed now)
Fuck! I gotta be on this hole with YOU man. I just know I shouldna come!

Bunny finds it funny, laughs.

BUNNY
Don't you worry bout a thing Junior, you with Audie Murphy here, my man ...

EXT. PERIMETER #3 - COMPANY CP - DUSK

At the Company CP, Captain Harris is talking urgently into the radio.

HARRIS
Bravo Three Alpha! Send me a grid. Send me a grid, over!

A young inexperienced VOICE screams back into the radio amid intense background FIRING filtered by radio and sounding disembodied.

RADIO VOICE
We're pinned down sir, they're in the fucking trees! The trees -

HARRIS
OK, Three Alpha, calm down now, son. I'm gonna get you a fire mission ASAP. Smoke'll be first ...

RADIO VOICE
(panic)
Lieutenant's dead sir, radioman look dead sir, I don't know where the map is Captain! They're all around us sir. They're moving! Hundreds of em! I can hear em talking gook!!! Jesus Christ!

HARRIS
(calming him)
... Just spot the smoke son and tell me where to shift. We'll get you out of there. Just hang tough and tell me where the rounds hit, over.

EXT. PERIMETER #3 - PLATOON CP - DUSK

At the Platoon CP, Barnes stands, legs akimbo, watching the jungle, anticipating the coming fight as overhead we now hear the 155 SHELLS whistle from a 10-mile distance - passing above them - then pounding down into the jungle in the near distance. Barnes turns, glances at Wolfe, smiles.

EXT. PERIMETER #3 - COMPANY CP - DUSK

At the Company CP, Captain Harris is back on the radio.

HARRIS
Bravo Three Alpha six. How bout those rounds son? Can you adjust fire?
(waits)
Three Alpha, if you can't talk, just key the handset twice over.
(waits)

Silence, then a vague MURMURING - becoming clearer and clearer. It's in Vietnamese. The radio is then bashed in, the sound like thunder in the Captain's ear. He looks at his RTO, both of them shocked.

EXT. NVA JUNGLE - NIGHT/DUSK

In the Jungle itself, the ENEMY is moving. Flurries of movement and sound, blurred visuals. Hands taping a piece of cloth to a tree, moving on - revealing a luminous arrow pointing left ... Figures moving past it.

Hands unraveling a thin wire waist-high, backwards.

Hands sliding along another wire. We now see a moving helmet with a luminous plaque on the back of it, leading a file up the wire. To a Jump-off point about 50 yards outside the U.S. perimeter. Figures crouch. Whispers. Movement. A pen flashlight on a drawing of the foxhole positions. The NVA moving out in several directions at once.

EXT. PERIMETER #3 - CHRIS' FOXHOLE - NIGHT

On their foxhole, Chris and Francis wait anxiously. Overhead the ARTILLERY keeps pounding into the ambush area. Now SMALL ARMS FIRE can be heard picking up at random spots along the perimeter. The battle, like a tide, is obviously moving closer to them.

FRANCIS
Oh shit me I wish I was back in Memphis now, oooh baby this is gonna be a motherfucker!

Chris says nothing. Suddenly off to their right, about 80 yards, a BLUE FIZZLE of light erupts.

CHRIS

Trip flares! ... Rodriguez's hole.

Rat-tat-tat-tat, rat-tat-tat. Machine gun, outgoing, followed by a sharp explosion. A ROCKET!

CHRIS (CONT'D)
RPGs! Shit!

VOICE
(crying)
MEDIC!! DOC! DOC!

A FIGURE thrashes up through the foliage behind them.

RHAH
(a fierce whisper)
Taylor! Francis!

CHRIS
Over here!

Rhah jumps into their hole with them, out of breath.

CHRIS (CONT'D)
Rhah! What's going on. Rodriguez's hole just got ...

RHAH
(gets his breath)
Okay, here it is - one, we got gooks in the fuckin' perimeter.

FRANCIS
Oh shit! Dat's it, dat's it ...

RHAH
They got through Alpha Company! Anything behind you don't identify itself, blow it away. Two - air strike's coming in. They gonna lay snake and nape right on the perimeter so stay tight in your holes and don't leave 'em.

FLARES now shoot up over the perimeter. Reds, greens, yellows, squeaking as they float doen on their parachute hinges throughout the ensuing battle. The perimeter is illuminated at spotty

intervals - sometimes arctic bright, sometimes inexplainably dark til new flares shoot up.

Chris, Francis, Rhah all look up at the light, and hug their holes even tighter, feeling naked in the light. Flares cut both ways.

RHAH (CONT'D)
... they're probing us, they gonna go up and down this line all night trying to get through. Stay cool ... I'll be back ...

Runs out of the foxhole. Chris suddenly reacting to a noise out front, gripping Francis and pointing to the sound.

A BODY is thrashing towards them, about twenty-five yards, not yet visible but a little awkward and lungy in it's movement, as if desperate.

Francis, tense, is about to pop his grenade when Chris grabs him.

CHRIS
Hold it!
(loud whisper)
WHO IS IT!

But the body keeps coming, lurching now, falling.

FRANCIS
Come on man!

CHRIS
No!

A POP! - then a fizzle of BLUE LIGHT as the Figure hits their trip flare - revealing itself to be large, with no helmet, and gasping, terrified of the trip flare.

TERRIFIED SOLDIER
DON'T SHOOT! DON'T SHOOT!

CHRIS
It's the ambush!
(calling out)
In here, man! Hurry.

The SOLDIER now runs in like a fullback going down for the tackle, sprawling into the hole, knocking Chris and Francis down beneath him.

He is sweating, terrified, a white boy with an unrecognizable, filthy face, no rifle, no helmet, his fatigues torn all over.

TERRIFIED SOLDIER
Water! Water!

Chris gives him his canteen, his shoulder and neck hurting from the collision. The Soldier sucks down the canteen.

TERRIFIED SOLDIER (CONT'D)
(between gulps)
They'se all over the place, hundreds of em moving this way! They wiped us out man, we didn't have a chance! Where's the CP?

FRANCIS
(points)
Back there.

The Soldier struggling out of the foxhole.

TERRIFIED SOLDIER
You guys get outta here! They're right on my ass and they ain't stoppin' for shit!

He tears off, leaving Francis in a state of incipient panic. He looks at Chris.

FRANCIS
Taylor, let's di-di man!

Chris adjusting position, facing the front, anger in his voice.

CHRIS
You go.

Francis hesitates, stays.

INT. PERIMETER #3 - BATTALION CP - NIGHT

At the Battalion CP, the Major is inside his BUNKER, busy between

his radio nets.

MAJOR
(to RTO 1)
Get me Bravo!

RTO 2
Charlie Company reports hand to hand on the perimeter sir. Three holes are down. They need help!

MAJOR
(looks at his watch, to his XO)
Okay move two squads from Alpha down there. Where's that goddamn air strike, you bet your ass if we were the First Cav they'd be here now.

RTO 1
(handing him the transmitter)
Bravo Six sir.

EXT. PERIMETER #3 - BATTALION CP - NIGHT

Just outside the Bunker, a MASTER SERGEANT spots something in the flarelight. TWO FIGURES with helmets running towards him at an angle.

MASTER SERGEANT
Hey you boys! Which Company you ...

A sudden burst of FIRE cuts the Sergeant down in his tracks and the Figures fly by.

Soldiers in the immediate area spot them.

SOLDIER #3
SAPPERS!

SOLDIER #4
THE BUNKER!

A burst of fire. One of the RUNNING FIGURES goes down. An Explosion engulfs him.

INT. PERIMETER #3 - BATTALION CP - NIGHT

But the SECOND SAPPER runs right into the bunker in a kamikaze

charge, the light from inside momentarily revealing a bulky satchel strapped on his person and the face of the astounded Major.

RTO 3
SIR!!

EXT. PERIMETER #3 BATTALION CP - NIGHT

The Bunker EXPLODES with a deafening roar.

EXT. PERIMETER #3 - CHRIS' FOXHOLE - NIGHT

In their foxhole, Chris and Francis look at the curling ball of flame, stunned.

CHRIS
Oh no!

EXT. PERIMETER #3 COMPANY CP - NIGHT

In their foxhole, Chris points.

CHRIS
There!

SHAPES moving in the trees. Chris blows his claymore handles. One explosion on top of the other out front. Then return fire. Flashes from a muzzle, rak-a-tak, rak-a-tak, rak-a-tak, the heavier sound of an AK-47.

Chris opening up with his 16. Then being blown down by a grenade explosion at the edge of the foxhole. Then nothing. A pause. Chris' ears ringing, slightly concussed.

Suddenly from down the perimeter there is the sound of a faulty LOUDSPEAKER crackling out from the jungle. A pidgen English, the words mauled, then a snatch of patriotic North Vietnamese music, played from a scratchy old record.

Chris uneasy, looking at Francis who looks terrified. The SOUND now of a whistle. Two hoots, then a sharp third. Then yelling.

Chris grabbing Francis' arm, pointing. There is a VOICE directly out to the front of them - muttering something in Vietnamese, no

more than 20 yards away but unseen. It's like hearing a casual conversation from another room, then the sounds of several bodies moving in separate directions - encompassing the foxhole.

CHRIS (CONT'D)
(to Francis, a whisper)
Out of the hole! Fast!

Chris crawls out, stops, looks back. Francis won't leave, hugs the shelter.

CHRIS (CONT'D)
(a fierce whisper)
Goddamit Francis! Move your fucking ass. Now ...
THEY GONNA BLOW IT!

Reaches in and yanks him with all his strength half out of the hole. Francis, finally sparked, now moves out. Both of them bellying it into the brush behind the hole.

Not a moment too soon. An RPG ROCKET whistling in.

The FOXHOLE takes a direct hit, caving in, whirls of smoke spinning off it.

Chris and Francis look back covered with debris. They hear movement.

SHADOWS are swarming towards the foxhole, firing into it to finish them off.

Francis grabs Chris' leg, indicating they get out of there. Chris hesitates - a moment, a decision made now in angry passion - rises up and charges the NVA.

SHADOWS scatter and tumble, caught by his surprise close-range fire.

Chris moving forward into them, blasting, agile, his instincts finely tuned, and totally insane in this moment of time, indifferent to his life. He YELLS insanities, pumping himself up with the adrenaline of courage.

CHRIS (CONT'D)
DIE YOU MOTHERFUCKERS!!! YAAAAAAAAA!!!

Screams from the dark shadows, they fall.

Chris smashing a wounded SHADOW with the butt of his gun down into the foxhole. He jumps back into it, reoccupying it. Blasting the dead gook.

Opening fire out to the front, driving the Shadows back.

Francis watching this, amazed. After a moment of doubt, he too tears back out to join Chris in the foxhole, unbelieving, as he jumps in with him.

FRANCIS
(joining in the frenzy)
YAAAAAHHHH!!!! KILLLLL!!!

Then stunned again to see Chris suddenly rise up out of the foxhole and charging forward into the jungle. He is now over the edge.

CHRIS
(charging off into the jungle)
DIE YOU MOTHERFUCKERS!!!

EXT. PERIMETER #3 - BUNNY'S FOXHOLE - NIGHT

In his position, Bunny is experiencing the same 'high' as Chris, yells out at them.

BUNNY
Come on MOTHERFUCKERS, COME ON!!!

Junior, huddled in the hole with him, speechless and terrified, looks at him with huge eyes. The guy is nuts. An incoming grenade explosion shakes the hole.

BUNNY (CONT'D)
(laying out more fire)
Come on you can do better than that!

JUNIOR
Fuck this shit! I ain't dyin' in no white man's war!
Ise didi-ing this motherfuckah!

Junior freaks out, throws his rifle down and hobbles out of the

hole on his damaged feet at an incredible speed.

BUNNY
(yelling after him)
Get back here you gutless shit ...

A SHAPE suddenly out of nowhere, looms up fast behind Bunny, running at him.

Junior, insane now with fear, runs smack into a tree, knocked senseless and reeling to the ground.

Bunny turning back too late. The crazy drug-high Shape is yelling something like:

NVA SOLDIER
Diiiiikaaeeeeeee!

And jumps right into the hole blasting Bunny point-blank in the chest.

Bunny struggling to consciousness at the bottom of the hole. THUCK! A boot in the gaping hole where his chest was. Bunny, his eyes uncomprehending. A muzzle is jammed into his mouth, breaking his teeth with an ugly sound. Another yell from the NVA trooper. A flash of orange red light. Bunny's face blown to bits.

Junior, dizzy from the blow to his head, looks up.

A yellow flare somewhere out there and a SHADOW above him digging a bayonet into his belly with a grunt. A long oozing sigh of belly gas.

An explosion. The Shadow with the bayonet staggering blind without eyes, holding his brains with his hands.

Barnes throws open the empty LAAW rocket casing he has just fired off and charges forward with a yell, cutting down another NVA in Bunny's old foxhole. Jumping into the hole, the bottom of which is a liquid pit of guts, blood, ooze. Another Enemy running in on him. A short burst of fire. Barnes hit. Firing into each other. Barnes draggin him down into the pit with him, grappling alongside the corpse of Bunny. Barnes uses an entrenching tool to finish him off.

EXT. PERIMETER #3 - PLATOON CP - NIGHT

At the Platoon CP, small arms fire is all over the place, the NVA closing the ring. Ace, in the foxhole, yells to Wolfe.

ACE
Negative contact. Can't raise Barnes, Two Bravo, Two Charlie, nothin'!

WOLFE
Get me Six!

Nervously aiming his rifle as a man comes running towards them, staggering.

ACE
It's Doc!

Doc plops down, out of breath, drained, bleeding all over his chest.

DOC
They're coming through all over! I can't ... I can't do ...

WOLFE
Where's Barnes!

DOC
I think he's dead ... it's awful, they're all dying.

Wolfe is stunned, Barnes his last crutch against the chaos. Ace handing him the handset.

ACE
Six!

CAPTAIN HARRIS' VOICE
Yeah! Send traffic or clear this goddamn net!

WOLFE
We've been overrun Captain, we're pulling back. Over!

EXT. PERIMETER #3 - COMPANY CP - NIGHT

At the Company CP, things are just as bad. A Radioman is sprawled over a smashed radio. Captain Harris is in a bunker working the radios himself, as his Radiomen fire at yelling, running FIGURES scurrying all over the inner perimeter.

HARRIS
(furious voice)
Bravo Two, Six! Goddamit where the hell you plannin' to pull back to! They're all over the perimeter. Be advised Lieutenant, you WILL hold in place and you will FIGHT and that means YOU, Lieutenant. Out!

EXT. PERIMETER #3 - PLATOON CP - NIGHT

At the Platoon CP, Wolfe is astounded by the message. Ace looking at him straight in the eye.

ACE
You're an asshole Lieutenant, you know that.

As he abandons his radio, grabs up his 16 and moves to an adjacent position. Doc, a quiet man up to now, is treating a wounded Parker who is now hit by bullets and thrashes wildly and jerks to a stop. He is obviously dead but Doc goes on trying to finish the bandage. Suddenly he goes beserk, grabs a 16, starts firing and yelling.

EXT. PERIMETER #3 - COMPANY CP - NIGHT

At the Company CP, Harris gets on the radio with the air strike. One of the RTOs on a separate radio calls over.

RTO #5
Captain, Third Battalion Armoured's on its way with tracks 'bout 2 kliks west!

HARRIS
(ignores it, into radio)
Snakebite leader, Ripper Bravo Six, we're gonna need you soonest be advised I've got zips in the wire down here, over!

PILOT'S VOICE
(distorted high frequency)

Roger your last Bravo Six, Snakebite lead we can't run it any closer. We're hot to trot and packing snape and nape but we're bingo fuel. It's your call, Six actual, Over.

Harris looks around. The decision made.

HARRIS
Snakebite leader, Bravo Six, for the record, it's my call. Dump everything you got left ON MY POS. I say again, I want all you're holding INSIDE the perimeter. It's a lovely war. Bravo Six Actual and Out.

Pilot's reaction. Very calm. A Farmboy twang.

PILOT'S VOICE
Roger your last Bravo Six. We copy it's your call. Get em in their holes down there. Hang tough, Bravo Six we are coming cocked for treetops. Whiskey to Echo ... Snakebite Two, this is lead. Last pass on zero niner. Watch my smoke to target, expend all remaining. Follow my trace ...

The transmission drops out. Harris now looking up into the darkened skies. The planes in no way evident - but they're there. And they're coming.

EXT. PERIMETER #3 - PLATOON CP - NIGHT

At the Platoon CP, the NVA are sweeping fast, crouched, using cover, yelling. Small fires are raging all over the perimeter.

Ace putting out fire, is hit. The NVA are coming over his sandbags. A burst of fire. Ace goes down.

Doc has cracked up, firing at anything, indifferent to his safety. One of the NVA goes down. The Doc is hit in the side, wounded, struggles, is hit again, but keeps trying to fire. He's hit a third time - in the jugular vein. Nearby, Wolfe is firing madly at the oncoming NVA. One goes down. A second is wounded, yelling in pain. Wolfe reloading his 16, popping up, too late. One of them is coming over the sandbags. He sees Wolfe. Wolfe sees him. In the same moment.

Wolfe hesitates, frozen up. The gook unloads his AK-47, a magazine worth, into Lieutenant Wolfe, who crashes down, sprawled unnaturally on the jungle floor. A spasm shakes his body. Then stops. Dead.

Boots run by.

EXT. PERIMETER #3 - O'NEILL'S FOXHOLE - NIGHT

At his foxhole, O'Neill peeks up out of the hole. Several NVA are darting through the jungle 20 yards away, coming towards him, talking loudly to each other. He quickly slips back down in the hole, entwining himself with the approaching NVA, clinking metal.

The NVA stop, glance in the hole. Something is muttered. They run out.

O'Neill opens his eyes, breathes.

EXT. PERIMETER #3 - BARNES' FOXHOLE - NIGHT

BARNES swings his mashed M-16 full into the FACE of an enemy SOLDIER who screams and goes down, Barnes chopping at him with his club. His helmet is gone, his shirt ripped to shreds, his shoulder bleeding, making his last stand against the hated Gooks.

Nearby HUFFMEISTER is hit in the shoulder by a running FIGURE and collapses into the bottom of the foxhole, crying out in pain.

The running FIGURE runs past right into the full force of BARNES' swinging rifle. SMACK! He crumples.

INTERCUT

Chris bellies into the area, see Barnes, recognizes him, amazed.

An ENEMY fires, taking Barnes high in the left thigh. A patch of skin blowing off. Barnes rigidly goes down on his left knee like a wounded horse. Holds there, staring into the Enemy, waiting for the coup de grace.

A series of SHOUTS and the Enemy staggers dead as:

Chris lays out a curtain of fire. A GRENADE goes off near him, blowing off his helmet. Dazed, Chris rushes forward firing from the hip - sucked into Barnes' suicidal vacuum. He cuts down an

Enemy as:

Barnes, given a new lease, limps angrily forward and tackles a wounded Enemy trying to crawl away, terrified at the sight of Barnes coming after him. Barnes lets out a vivid scream.

And beats the soldier mercilessly, half the stock of his M-16 flying apart broken.

Chris swivels alert on his knees. A pause. No more enemy. Turns to Barnes, his back to Chris still beating at the dead corpse.

CHRIS
Barnes!

Barnes swivels instinctively off the corpse and for a petrifying moment Chris sees:

A maddened scar of a face, lips specked with foam. The EYES - refracted in a red-green flare overhead - the pupils distorted into angry red points.

For Chris it is no doubt the most frightening single image he has seen in his life. It will be in his nightmares forever. The essence of evil: wrath, obsession, anger, fear, hatred, permanence - he is paralyzed.

Barnes smashes him full across the face with the broken stock of his M-16. Not even conciously, for at this point, his mind has gone over the edge and the entire world is his enemy. American or Vietnamese, it makes no difference as he strikes Chris harder and harder.

Chris struggles, moans, his teeth and nose cracked. Barnes emits another chilling yell an springs like a humpback up on his good right leg, the left bent - set to deliver the killing blow, the mangled rifle pulled to its highest arc.

CHRIS (CONT'D)
Noooooooooo!

The PHANTOM FIGHTER JET comes now like a great white whale. One big beautiful monstrous beat of deafening sound. Its silver and white belly hurtling low over the treeline in one giant leap of

sound momentarily illuminated by a flare. Then a monstrous ROAR of anger.

The bomb ripping Barnes off the body of Chris and spitting Chris across the jungle floor - crashing into a tree some 30 yards away.

FADE OUT

EXT. PERIMETER #3 - CHRIS' JUNGLE - DAWN

FADE BACK IN. Vague sunlight. Blurry. Chris fluttering his eyes. A sharp MOVEMENT in the bush. His eyes fight their way open.

SOFT EYES are watching him from behind foliage. A soft, furry head, alert, rigidly still.

Chris fights his way up to his elbow, in pain, looking at the eyes. The head turns and in one fluid move, bolts. Gone. Like the wind. A deer. A big brown deer. Or was it? Chris will never be quite sure. But whatever it was, it was surely a sign of grace - the grace of Elias. This he knows as he feels himself for the first time alive.

And in pain. His left hand torn and bleeding, shrapnel in his side, cuts on his face, dried blood caking him. Looking around his garden of eden. A messy jungle floor. Cordite fumes. Burned bush and trees. Torn sandbags. Dead NVA. Bird songs somewhere in the distance. It is the very crack of dawn, a pink-red sun casting long oblique light patterns through the trees. A holy light.

Chris pushes himself to his feet, feels his weight and the pain. He walks. In the near distance, towards the LZ area, there's the sound of Armored Personnel carriers grinding, men moving, calling out in Americanese. But Chris is alone here.

He fishes up an AK-47 from a dead NVA. Checks it, a weapon. Walks on.

EXT. PERIMETER #3 - BARNES' FOXHOLE - DAY

Past scores of NVA bodies. Past the Foxhole where Bunny lays dead in the bottom, faceless. Looking over at Junior bayoneted

to the ground, dead. NVA everywhere around the hole, some of them still moving, badly wounded.

Chris looking around, then noticing a movement a little further out in the Jungle. Then he sees who.

The uniform is shredded, the figure obviously hurt in several places (thigh, back, neck, hand) but not mortally so, now struggling to right itself, dragging its face up from a belly-down position. Streaked with dirt and blood, we see Barnes once again re-emerging from the dead.

Chris steps over to him, a solemn look on his face. Barnes looks up, begs.

BARNES
Get me a Medic will ya. Go on ...

Chris doesn't move. Barnes looks at him again, reading the intention that has crossed Chris' mind. An expression of surprise crosses his face, then amazement, almost shock.

BARNES (CONT'D)
Fuck you in hell ...

Chris shoots him. Once. Twice. Three times. Silence ...

Barnes is finally dead.

Chris looking at the corpse, numbed, no exultation in his expression. Just cold satisfaction and little feeling left.

Behind him, the SOUND of a big machine moving. He turns.

A huge Nazi flag on an antenna looms up in the bush, followed by the great belly of a turreted dragon crunching down a tree for its breakfast.

A big tough GERMAN SHEPARD comes boudning at him sniffs, followed by a flak-jacketed MONSTER MAN - filthy and greasy, unshaven face, earring in his left ear, 'DEATH CORPS' scrawled on his shirtless flak jacket and a drawing of a death's head, he looks like a cross between a pirate and a hell's angel. Behind him, a SECOND MONSTER MAN and the ARMORED PERSONNEL CARRIER grinding its engine, a human skull hanging from its turret.

MONSTER MAN
(to Dog)
Bozo! Get back here!

His eyes passing on Chris like so much meat.

MONSTER MAN (CONT'D)
(to Chris)
Can you walk outta here?

Chris nods. The Soldier pointing to the LZ behind him as a sign he should go that way. The other Soldier already stripping the NVA dead, as the APC grinds on into the jungle, reconnoitering.

Chris walks out of the jungle, head bowed, nauseated, mixed feelings roiling him.

EXT. PERIMETER #3 - FRANCIS' FOXHOLE - DAY

In another foxhole, Francis waits, the sounds of the approaching APC cutting through. He thinks about it a moment. It must be fast. It must be a hard cold decision. Now!

He pulls out his K-bar and with one last anguished hesitation, drives it into his thigh muscle.

Francis yells out and collapses in his hole.

EXT. PERIMETER #3 - O'NEILL'S FOXHOLE - DAY

In another foxhole, O'Neill, unscratched but covered with dirt, waits tentatively as SOLDIERS arrive at his hole. They're a little awed by the sight of the tough-looking O'Neill emerging from his foxhole like Sgt.Rock, dozens of dead NVA littered around him.

APC SOLDIER #1
You alone Sarge?

O'NEILL
Fuck yeah. They all left me, bunch of fuckin' faggots.

APC SOLDIER #2
Man, you gonna get yoself a silver star.

O'NEILL
Fuck the silver star. You got any booze?

EXT. PERIMETER #3 - RHAH'S FOXHOLE - DAY

Rhah, alive and well, is poking around the NVA corpses with a long gnarled walking stick, looking like a crazy Johnny Appleseed with his pants rolled up on his thin hairy ankles and wearing a red bandana tied in a four-knot around his head.

As one of the APC SOLDIERS carves an ear off a dead NVA, Rhah works his way through the torn bloody pocket of an NVA Troop in full rigor mortis, extracting what he thought was there - a wrapped cellophane of heroin.

Rhah's face glows with satisfaction as he tastes it, then snorts it. With a certain satisfaction of triumph over the grim circumstances.

RHAH
(to the powder)
Yeah, that's good shit ...

EXT. PERIMETER #3 - LZ - DAY

CHRIS is hauled out on a litter. Morphined, his eyes watching it all from somewhere deep in his brain. Passing:

Groups of SOLDIERS looking like bowery bums and moving like rats through the smoke and garbage snooping for souvenirs with wheezy tired eyes and grunts of greed.

Passing a bulldozed PIT with heaps of NVA BODIES in them. a BULLDOZER pushing another set of bodies in, like photos of a Nazi death camp.

Nearby, two burly SOLDIERS lift a WOMAN NURSE and with a once-through build for momentum, toss the fresh body into the pit.

Chris, numb, goes by.

RADIO OPERATOR
(into radio, exhausted)
- 37 U.S. KIA, 122 wounded and still counting.

Estimate 500 Victor Charlie KIA, 22 wounded and still counting. Over.

2ND RADIO OPERATOR
Sir, a television crew's coming in with the General -

CAPTAIN HARRIS doesn't respond; at this point he doesn't give a shit, standing apart from the radios looking numbly at the remnants of his boys filtering by on litters.

Chris intersects him now, Harris' eyes looking blankly, then nodding sickly trying to give him encouragement. Just coming to the edge of tears, choking it back, and turning back. These are his sons who are lost. A good officer.

Rodriguez, wounded, is lifted up in his litter and moved out to the waiting MEDIVAC CHOPPER, a huge red cross painted on a white square.

Doc goes by on another litter, then Ace, Adams, Huffmeister, etc.

Then Francis is littered by, bandages around his leg, a big smile on his face.

FRANCIS
Hey Taylor, you okay man?

CHRIS
Yeah. How 'bout you?

FRANCIS
Jes' fine man, jes fine! Ain't never felt better!
Both of us two timers man, we're out.
(gives him a slap as he goes by)
See you at the hospital man, we gonna get high-high yessir ...
(goes off)

The Medic points to the chopper.

MEDIC
(to Chris)
That's your ride man, you ready?

CHRIS

(tries a smile)
You bet.

Chris starts towards it, the Medic assisting him.

EXT. PERIMETER #3 - LZ - DAY

Sgt.O'Neill watches the loading process forlornly from the distance. Captain Harris intersects him.

HARRIS
You got Second Platoon Sergeant.

O'NEILL
(reflexively)
Yes sir -

And as Harris moves away, O'Neill is left thinking. Finally there is a certain frustration to his actions; he has taken such great pains to stay alive that the tuition he pays is precisely to stay in this Jungle. Inevitably his time will come - one way or another.

His eyes now follow the MEDIVAC CHOPPER upwards, whatever is left of his shrunken soul yearning to go with it.

EXT/INT: PERIMETER #3 LZ CHOPPER - DAY

As the Chopper rises off the battlefield, Chris, who is sitting at the edge so that he has a full view out the open door, waves back at Rhah.

EXT. PERIMETER #3 - DAY

Rhah, at the edge of the treeline, vigorously shakes his walking stick at him, his other hand a fist, waving them, emitting his cry.

RHAH
Baaaaaaaaa!!!!!!

Defiance. Pride. Dig me, I'm Rhah - and there isn't nobody like me in the world.

EXT/INT: PERIMETER #3 - LZ CHOPPER - DAY

The chopper - with its huge red cross painted on - now rising to meet God. Smashed on morphine, Chris looking out at the waving ants below.

Now the trees, the skyline and the chopper is moving fast over the devestation. The jungle forever locked in his memory, Chris looks back, copious, quiet tears flowing from his eyes.

CHRIS (V.O.)
I think now, looking back, we did not fight the enemy, we fought ourselves - and the enemy was in us ... The war is over for me now, but it will always be there - the rest of my days. As I am sure Elias will be - fighting with Barnes for what Rhah called possession of my soul ... There are times since I have felt like the child born of those two fathers ... but be that as it may, those of us who did make it have an obligation to build again, to teach to others what we know and to try with what's left of our lives to find a goodness and meaning to this life ...

The music surges now to its full strength as we replay bits of film with each actor's name listed - some with silly, clowning looks, others sober, haunted. Gardner, Tex, King, Rhah, Lerner, Sanderson, Manny, Big Harold - all the boys ... and then Barnes staring quietly into the camera, and lastly Elias - shirt off, bowl of grass in hand, his big, beautiful smile.

FADE OUT: